

REMEMBER THE FIG TREE

All the way through history, God's people have had a tough time staying free. No matter what God does, we find ourselves in bondage of one sort or another through sin, worship of false gods, false doctrine, or captivity by the enemy. God's plan for humanity's freedom was sabotaged by man for the first time in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden, and this pattern has been repeated to this day.

Fortunately, God's mercy is everlasting. He always steps in and raises up a man or a woman to bring hope and deliverance, and to usher in yet another era of His peace. These are people of destiny, people who know their place in history, people who are stamped with God's call right from conception and even earlier... people who understand that God made them who they are and created them for a life of good deeds, prepared in advance for them to do. (cf. Eph. 2:10)

Moses was one of the greatest--a man born for a purpose--a purpose that must have burned in his heart from the day he was born to the day he died. As Stephen acknowledges in Acts 7:20, he was no ordinary man.

We all need a compelling sense of destiny. We need to understand that all of our personal circumstances, including where and when we were born, our life experience, and who we are, have all been used by God to train us for a purpose in His Kingdom. Without this understanding we will lose sight of our vision, our hope and our calling.

As the oppression of the Israelites became more relentless and cruel, they began to call on the name of the Lord. He responded by raising up His man, Moses.

✦ **It was curiosity that first caused Moses to turn toward God in the burning bush.**

That causes me to ponder, how many times has God given me something out of the ordinary, some little coincidence that should have caused me to stop in my tracks and turn to Him, but I did not.

✦ **Then came the voice from the burning bush.**

I ponder, how many times have I let God's voice fall on deaf ears.

✦ **The voice told Moses that he was standing on holy ground.**

I ponder, how many times have I stood on holy ground and not understood that God was already there waiting for me.

✦ **God sent Moses to help his people.**

How many times have I ignored the needs of God's people even as God was calling my name to serve them.

How many times--How many times.

✦ **But there was one time when I got it right.**

I came into full communion with the Catholic Church eighteen years ago. Shortly after that, I received a phone call from Dale, one of my wife's co-workers. The local chapter of Habit for Humanity was just getting started, and they needed another board member. I was really busy at that time, but my recent experience in RCIA helped me to discern the call of God in all of this, and I said yes.

I was really hesitant to commit to more than one night per month out of my busy schedule, but when I visited the jobsite, I saw Dale laying block under a Habitat home that they moved from another lot. I was thinking "What a cold hard job that was", and "How glad I was--that it was not me working under that home". Dale was there every Saturday all through the winter laying block. Suddenly, I had a change of heart. Dale was busy too, but he made the time to help others. Though he was unaware, he had become "My Moses" come to set me free from my selfish ways.

The word came to me that we are "To share the gifts that we are given". I could not deny that I had been given the gift of knowing of how to build a home. That was my day job. Maybe I could spend one weekend per month working on the next Habitat jobsite. Little did I know that one weekend would turn into seven years of Saturdays working for Habit for Humanity.

A typical Saturday began in the parking lot of the church. I would listen to Christian music to prepare my heart for Eucharistic Adoration. After about forty minutes of Adoration, people began to gather for daily Mass, and we would pray the Rosary together. After Mass about twelve of us would go to Village Inn for breakfast. Often we talked a little longer than I should have, and I was a little late getting to the habitat site. Chuck would always say "Late again today, huh Christy", and I would reply "The Bible says that we all get the same wages"!

All this prayer and service resulted in the most spiritually productive period of my life, and it led to my discernment to become a deacon. Along the way we built homes for twenty-two families who needed a simple decent place to live and a 5-plex apartment building for Emergency Residence Project.

In the kingdom of God, you cannot give a blessing without receiving one in return. The gift that I received from all of this was faith. Many times the Habitat jobsites were out of town, and on the way home I would offer my profound thanks to God for being with me all that day, and He would give me tears of joy as a consolation. I had begun to understand that He was always with me, and it was I that chose not to see Him in the daily events of my life. As my faith grew, I marveled at how gentle His call was for me.

No one comes to faith alone. Faith is always a gift from God, but He has chosen to give that faith through others. I will be forever grateful to all of you at Saint Cecilia and all of those in the Habitat community for that most precious gift of faith. It is truly the pearl of great price, the most precious gift that I will ever receive.

Our community here at Saint Cecilia is alive with opportunities to grow in faith. God's grace is everywhere. Just this year we have added many new ministries such as Gabriel Ministry, Alpha, Date Night, The Grand Adventure, ManUp and Stephen Ministry. Take some time to become acquainted with these ministries in our Time and Talent Catalog. I apologize for the title. I know Time and Talent is a really boring title for a catalog that can change your life. In the light of today's Gospel, maybe we should have called it our "Home and Garden Catalog, since that is where you will find the nourishment for your fig tree. If spiritual growth is what you are looking for, you will find "the way" in this little catalog. And if you join us at the Ministry Fair next weekend, you will also be able to talk to some of the volunteers that make these opportunities possible.

This weekend we will commission fifteen Stephen Ministers who have been studying for the last six months to become distinctively Christian care-givers. You may have seen their pictures displayed in the narthex. They have been well nourished during the training sessions, and I am not just talking about the great food that the training team brought in. Many of them are already seeing their care receivers. All of us have formed a very close faith sharing community as we have gone about our training. I know that Stephen Ministry will bear much fruit in the name of the parish. At the end of the day, they too will realize that you cannot give a blessing without receiving one in return.

Like Moses in today's first reading, we are people who have heard the call and answered "Here I am, Lord". We are people of destiny, people who know their place in history, people who are stamped with God's call right from conception and even earlier... people who understand that God made us who we are and created us for a life of good deeds, prepared in advance for us to do.

We may be just the people that God is sending to someone you know to capture their curiosity so that they can turn to Him and hear His voice.

So what has God been training you to do? Now is the acceptable time to have a change of heart. The days are getting shorter and God is patiently waiting to hear from you. If you turn to Him, He will nourish your faith with springs of living water and He will give you the consolation of His joy. But don't wait too long. Find your place in history before it is too late. Remember the fig tree.

Deacon Alan Christy

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