

Each evening at the end of its broadcast, NBC News runs a segment titled: “**Making a Difference.**” As mentioned previously in citing examples from it, the report spotlights an individual who, through giving of themselves to some form of service, has made, or is making, a positive life-enhancing change in another individual’s or community’s life.

“**Making a Difference**” is a way to contextualize Jesus’ message about the cost and ethics of discipleship in today’s Gospel passage. Jesus is *not* literally commanding us to abandon family relationships. But, he is warning us that sometimes family or other relationships can get in the way of the whole-hearted commitment to following him. Should that be the case, then we must decide where our primary love, loyalty, and following lies and, if necessary, be willing to sacrifice even the relationships closest to us for the sake of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God Jesus has come to bring. There are a number of examples down through the history of the Church where individuals have done precisely this. Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi come readily to mind.

Such radical commitment arises from our baptism as St. Paul in today’s second reading from the letter to the Romans describes. In the sacrament of baptism we were “buried with Christ, baptized into his death”—in the words of St. Benedict: “preferring nothing to the Love of Christ”—thereby passing through its waters already entering into the eternal life of God Jesus gained through his death and resurrection on the cross; “that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”

“**Making a Difference.**” The choice whether to live for one’s self, or to live for others. The history of the world is filled with examples of those who made a difference by living for themselves. Think of some of the most despotic kings, dictators, and other self-centered individuals who enriched themselves in their lust for power, money and fame, and in the process destroyed the lives of countless people, and in the end, themselves: Adolf Hitler, and Sadaam Hussein being two contemporary examples.

In calling us to “lose one’s life in order to find it” Jesus challenges us to live his own ethic of self-emptying, self-sacrificing love. We experience both the reality of this love and

its accompanying call of Jesus here at Mass as bread and wine are transformed into his Body and Blood, and we receiving him in Holy Communion are challenged to be transformed to be his Body and Blood today.

Self-emptying, self-sacrificing love, as Jesus speaks about them can at times be very dramatic and heroic, such as a police, fire or other emergency worker foregoing their own safety in the attempt to save another, however they usually present themselves to us in seemingly small and ordinary but nonetheless real, ways every day. “Giving a cup of cold water” to someone that thirsts, Jesus says is a means of salvation not only for the one who receives the gift, but also for the giver. Writing a letter, sending a text message, signing an on-line petition to a lawmaker on issues such as abortion, opposition to the death penalty, a just immigration process, health care that includes access for the most vulnerable and voiceless among us—are some examples calling us to abandon self-preoccupation, even if for a few minutes, and giving of ourselves for the sake of others. Serving food to the hungry at “Food at First”, being a Stephen Minister, helping with a “Habitat for Humanity” build project, “Sewing for Girls”, assisting men and women transitioning from prison back into society through the Matthew 25 and Butterfly House, providing food for a post-funeral luncheon—are only a few of many daily opportunities here at St. Cecilia’s where in our love for Jesus we “lose our life” for his sake in order to “find it” abundantly in him. But, as always, the choice is ours.

The hymn “Go Make A Difference” in our hymnal sings it up best:

Go make a difference. We can make a difference. Go make a difference in the world.

We are the salt of the earth, called to let people see the love of God in you and me.

We are the light of the world, not to be hidden but be seen.

We are the hands of Christ reaching out to those in need, the face of God for all to see.

We are the spirit of hope; we are the voice of peace.

So let your light shine on, let it shine for all to see.

Go make a difference in the world.

Fr. Jim Secora