

Pastor's Pen: #Evangelization2018 Part 1

"Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and earth,

Go, therefore, and make disciples of the nations!

Baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Teach them to carry out all that I commanded you.

And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world! Mathew28:18b-20

These last words of Christ to the Apostles in the Gospel of Matthew are excellent words with which to begin the year 2018. In these words we find the essential and central mission of the Church. These words of Christ, a directive to evangelize, are at the very heart of who we are and always have been as the Body of Christ in this world. When are baptized into the Body of Christ, we are brought into her mission. During the Anointing with Chrism Oil at baptism, we are directed (be it the adult coming in or the parents of an infant) to share in this evangelical mission of bringing Christ into the lives of all we meet.

Training disciples

For the apostles who heard these words, they had been given training. For three years they followed Jesus. They saw the miracles. They were given instruction in such a way that even the best of seminaries could never provide. They didn't always get it. However, what they were given was enough to provoke them to leave the safety and security of everything they knew and proclaim a seemingly ridiculous message throughout the world: a crucified Messiah who frees us from sin and death.

Christ gives us the same opportunity to learn at His feet. He gives us a share in His life through the sacraments of the Church, He gives us the educational and spiritual formation of His Church, and He gives us the primary incubator of disciples, the family. In the coming year, our parish needs to help bolster each of these elements. It is our job as a parish to make sure that we have not just the tools to get about the work of the Kingdom, but that we have the best of tools.

It is times like this where remembering who we are as Catholics transcends mere parish boundaries. One of the challenges of being pastor of two parishes, especially when the size of those parishes are as different as they are, is that I must acknowledge that elements such as budget, staff, and volunteers must be taken into account as to how we approach our task of evangelization. Christ and His Church do not differentiate the call to evangelization based on the size of a parish. Remember, the earliest churches were small and in homes. In some of the things I am purposing, both parishes will need to take into account the abilities of the other and help each other as is fit; that is part and parcel of our catholicity.

Training through the Sacraments All of our efforts will fall short without the grace of God. A Catholic who exempts themselves from the sacramental life of the Church is doomed to failure in living its mission. Without the sacraments we lose sight of why we do what we do. Without the sacraments

the essential character of the Church is reduced to a social club or social work club. I am not saying that either of these are evil. In fact, a healthy parish has a familial bond that brings us together and a outreach to the larger community, especially to the needy of the local community. However, the Church is more than that.

In the sacraments we are given the grace necessary to live out the essential catholic charism: evangelization. Each sacrament is given to bolster that grace in the life of a member of the Body of Christ so as to engage in evangelization as God sees fit. They are pathways for the Holy Spirit to breathe the boldness and wisdom necessary to live the life of Christ in such a way as to go and make disciples. The sacraments, when received in a state of grace (baptism gives us this gift), insert the life of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ, so as to embolden us to engage. When that state of grace is lost through mortal sin, the Confession must be done to restore it so that the other sacramental graces given us are not squandered.

Part of the things I wished to do to bolster this have already started. It is why in adult education I am focusing on the Mass. Last semester we went through the Constitution on the Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) and we will be doing the General Instruction of the Roman Missal for the second semester. This class meets in the parish hall at SS Peter and Paul at 7PM on most Tuesdays starting on the 9th of January. It is why I have already greatly expanded the times for confession in both parishes. It is why I am speaking frequently about the sacraments during the homilies. Over the next year, we will also be evaluating the preparation programs for the sacraments so as to make sure we are giving those who are being formed into the sacramental life of the Church the best available tools.

It is why I will be absolutely insistent that anyone who calls themselves Catholic within the parish boundaries is going to Mass every Sunday and Holy Day. If chronic illness or advanced age prevents that, I have an army of Eucharistic Ministers and myself to bring the sacraments to them. I try to get out once a month to afford access to the Eucharist, Confession, and Anointing of the Sick to our ill and aged. I have others in the Boonville Correction Facility who I will now go to twice a month to afford them Mass and Confession. Everyone else, if they are going to be authentic about their faith, MUST avail themselves to the Mass and Confession. We cannot engage in the mission of the Church if we are starving ourselves of the ability to do so.

Because the sacramental life of the Church is essential to our Catholic identity, being on a parish roster will not be considered enough unless one is ill and of advanced age (unable to get out). Too many times, people will put themselves on parish rosters so as to have access to a parochial school for free. Our diocese does not charge parishioners for tuition on the belief that Catholics who put their children into our schools are living the faith. Chronically exempting oneself and one's children from the sacramental life of the Church tells me that what is actually being sought is a free private education and not a Catholic education. I have no interest in fully supplementing a private education. I also have no interest in throwing people off of our parish roster. However, I am asking that such families be honest and either start living the sacramental life of the Church or be removed from our roster and be tuition families. We must be honest.