

From the Deacon's Desk

Scripture Today:

I have always been fascinated with the image we are given in the first line of the second reading today, but it is something that is reinforced repeatedly through the entire bible. **“The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness.”** If ever we doubt that God works through paradoxes, and in ways that seem to go against what our world and society tell us is important, that line surely reminds us of that. God's power comes through weakness. In fact, when we look at the most significant encounters with God in the Bible, we find God shining forth in the most unwanted and unsuspected places in the world: the material and even vulnerable world. So whereas the values of the world tell us that power and control are indicators of success, God's message is that vulnerability, weakness, and even powerlessness are the allies of God.

Most people like to think of God in terms of love, but even if you think about your own experiences of love, love too is always about giving up control. This is also true of faith. We see this especially in Jesus' death on the cross. Among other things, it tells us how God loves and redeems us even when we are unfaithful and our lives are broken. It is not surprising that hundreds of millions of people, young and old, wear a cross in some form. The cross is the ultimate symbol of love. It shows us what love is, and what love does for us. It is a reminder that God works through all the broken moments of our lives.

Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, used to say that we understood the make-up of things best when we see them lying in pieces—shattered. In the brokenness we see the underlying structure. This is also true of faith. We now have the ability to find God in all things, even the sinful and the broken, the painful and the tragic. Perhaps the most healing power on earth appears when imperfect people, dismissing all signs to the contrary, know their enormous power to bless this wounded world. It happens not when we have conquered our weakness or failures, but when we accept that those very human traits do not define us.

What defines us is in whose image and likeness we are made. In us it will always be a flawed, sometimes awkward, sometimes blundering image. The secret to spiritual health is to acknowledge our brokenness and that we are sinners without any need to rationalize or excuse ourselves, and all the while remembering that God loves us, deeply and irrevocably, in our weakness. Perhaps God's message to us is clear, simple, peaceful, and compelling: Relax. The kingdom of love is yours!

Alpha in the Diocese:

A few weeks ago I did a presentation on the Alpha Program for all the pastors and pastoral administrators at the bishop's quarterly meeting (Bishop Cistone meets with us four times a year as a group), and many pastoral leaders were impressed at the success we had for being a small parish. As a result, three parishes in our diocese have asked to meet with me to discuss their plans for doing Alpha in their parishes this coming year. We likewise plan to continue running Alpha for all those interested and for those who experienced it this year. Perhaps you can invite someone you know to consider trying it for themselves.

In addition, we will offer other faith formation opportunities for those who completed Alpha, and who want to continue on in their spiritual formation. We will also look for ways in which we as a parish can reach out to those former members of our parish who seemed to have stopped coming.

Whole Community Catechesis:

As I continue to write about whole community catechesis, one question I've been asked is why the focus on calling it catechesis or faith formation, and not religious education or religion class. At the Second Vatican Council it was important for the bishops of the world to refer to the Church using new language. In order for the reform envisioned by Pope John XXIII to become reality, we needed a new way of speaking about the Church. So the bishops began to refer to the Church under a new name: the People of God. They knew that if the Church was called that, soon it would *become* that, and they were right!

Likewise, the pope and bishops renewed our understanding of ourselves as part of the *Body of Christ*. Refer to people as members of Christ's Body, they reasoned, and they will *become* Christ's Body for the world. The pope and bishops knew that language affects our perception of reality and, in turn, our actions. If we call something by a new but true name, it becomes that reality!

The same is true for whole community catechesis. How we name what we do is very important. *We will become what we call ourselves*. If we continue calling our programs schools of religion, or religious education programs, or religion class, most people will envision the schooling model, and as something primarily for children.

Did you ever notice Jesus' model of teaching? Jesus taught adults and played with children. Somewhere along the line we lost that vision, and so for many people they see faith formation as something for children. Faith in general is adult business, and faith formation (like Jesus showed us) is primarily most fruitful when directed toward adults. We will always have a place for teaching children the basics of our faith practices, but to comprehend faith fully, we must see it through adult eyes.

Starting in October, on the first Sunday of each month, we will offer Whole Community Catechesis as an addition to our existing Faith Formation Programs. After the 9:30 morning Mass, all those adults, teens, and children who are interested will gather for Whole Community Catechesis which begins with a sit-down family breakfast, followed by an hour of catechesis on the topics listed below. **Whole Community Catechesis is for everyone in the parish: Young, older, married, single, families, and those without children or empty-nesters.**

No registration is needed, nor will attendance be taken. We will need a general idea of how many people plan to attend so we can have enough food available, so we will ask you to sign up in September. **We will have breakfast from 10:45 until 11:15, followed by catechesis from 11:15 until 12:15 pm. The schedule and topics are as follows:**

Sunday October 1st – Fear Not

Sunday November 5th – Gratefulness

Sunday December 3rd – Advent

Sunday January 7th – Baptism & Discipleship

Sunday February 4th – Lent

Sunday March 4th – Easter Triduum

Sunday April 1st – Death & Resurrection

Sunday May 6th – Eucharist