

From the P.A.'s Desk

Reaching Out To Others:

Not long ago I read a book called *The Cloister Walk* by Kathleen Norris, and in the book she tells of a wonderful story of homecoming: "Not long ago, I was asked by a college student how I could stand to go to church, how I could stand the hypocrisy of Christians. I had one of my rare inspirations, when I know the right thing to say, and I replied, "The only hypocrite I have to worry about on Sunday morning is myself. Even when I find church boring, I try to hold this in mind as a possibility; like all the other fools who have dragged themselves to church on Sunday morning, including the pastor, I am there because I need to be reminded that love can be the center of all things, if we only keep it there... I am profoundly moved by the hospitality of Cecil Williams, the pastor of a church in San Francisco, who insists that "the church is not just for believers." In his book about the church, *No Hiding Place*, he says, simply, "When people come to our church, we don't ask them if they are atheists, Methodists, or Buddhists. We ask them what their names are and how they're doing."

Another story that illustrates the ministry of outreach to the alienated and inactive is taken from a book entitled *Inviting Catholics Home*. "In the early years of my priesthood, I often wondered why Catholics left the Church. Was there something wrong with the Church? Something wrong with them? What were the real reasons? Then one night I was at a social function... a man came up to me with a drink in his hand and said quite loudly: "Hey, Padre, I used to be Catholic." I said: "How long has it been?" He said: "Twenty years." I said: "Have you ever thought about coming back?" He said: "Many times." I said: "Why didn't you come back?" He said: "Because no one ever asked me." I asked him. He set down his drink and we talked. We talked for several days after that. He and his family came back."

In today's highly-complex, enormously competitive, fast-moving, TV-and computer-dominated society, there is a lot of pain and alienation. People are hurting. Their separation from their church and their God adds to their pain. The compassionate Jesus, who spent most of his time on earth reaching out and healing those in need, continues his ministry of reaching out and healing those in need through you and me. Do you know someone who is alienated from the Church who—like the person in the previous story—might be ready to come back if someone (maybe you) were to ask them? A few weeks ago I ran across some suggestions from the parish bulletin in Alma, in how we might open our faith to others we meet. These are Fr. Nate's suggestions: "We have a great opportunity to revitalize the church . . . given the emphasis upon the living example of how to focus the faith on service, love, and mercy. We will want to learn more about the faith so that we can live it. Our primarily evangelization step has been taken by Francis; we merely need to be a loving, joyful, and merciful community, when those inspired by God decide to 'check us out.' Also, maybe we can be more intentional about looking for opportunities to evangelize: Take a parish bulletin to a family member, especially one who might feel alienated. Invite someone to Mass. If they turn you down, invite them again next week. Invite someone to a parish or community event, e.g. "I am going to bible study. Want to join me? We can go out for lunch after!" Distribute flyers of upcoming parish events. Tell someone about a helpful church experience you had, such as the parish mission, a homily, or the relief you felt when you went to the sacrament of Reconciliation and made your confession. Tell someone you will pray for them, or invite them to pray with you on the spot. If you visit others for vacation, tell them you wish to go to Mass. Go to discovermass.com to find one. Wear a religious symbol, pin, or cross as a conversation piece. Tell someone new in your neighborhood about your parish; give them a bulletin. Say "God bless you" when someone sneezes, even strangers. Encourage someone who has a question about faith, or who has had a bad experience with Christianity, to talk to someone who may be able to help them. Celebrate baptism anniversaries with children, grandchildren, and godchildren. How will you evangelize this week?

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Sick and Hospital Calls:

I have acclimated to the parish pretty quickly, and continue to do so, but one area I feel deficient in is visitation to the sick and homebound, either at home or in the hospital. If you know someone who would like a visit from me, please let me know. I cannot anoint, but I can pray with those who are sick and suffering. We all know that those who are sick feel alienated and cut-off from the faith community, and often they wonder where God is in their suffering. That is where we come in. As an incarnational religion (God comes to us through each other), we, and especially me, needs to be more active in that ministry. I understand that a few people from the parish visit the sick almost weekly, and I'd love to tag along with you. If you know someone who is sick and suffering and needs a visit for prayer and support, please let me know personally.

P.A.'s Day Off:

As I mentioned in my introductory letter to the parish, my ministry in the parish is my life. Working for the church is my passion, so in a sense, I never need a break from that. I will try to take Friday's off when possible so I can clean the rectory and do grocery shopping, but other than that, I love being here. On days when working Friday is required, I'll be here for that too. Both last Friday and next Friday we have vigil services, so I'll adjust my time as needed. A pastor or pastoral administrator has the flexibility to be fluid with their hours, so I can move my schedule around. In most parishes, Saturday and Sunday are really like half days anyway, so it all balances out in the end.

Scripture Today:

In today's reading from Luke's Gospel, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. What is important to grasp is not the words of the prayer, but the attitude of prayer Jesus teaches. To pray is not to impose our will on God but to ask God to make us open to his will. Authentic prayer, as taught by Jesus and contained in the Lord's Prayer, has three elements: 1) Acknowledging the goodness and love of God. All prayer begins with gratitude for God's blessings upon us. Jesus teaches us to call God "Father," and in Aramaic, the original word is "Abba," meaning literally "Daddy." In other words, God has the qualities of a loving Parent who delights in caring for us and seeing us happy. 2) Asking that we may do God's will. We ask for the grace to be more loving, forgiving, and merciful, as God is to us. We ask God to make his will and desire our own. 3) Voicing our hope in the providence of God. We come to God knowing that, just as a friend or parent will provide for their beloved, God will hear our prayers and give us more than we need. Even if it seems that our prayers are unanswered, we live with the confidence that God is always present to us.

If you're like me, you pray constantly throughout the day. I say "printed" prayers daily, as well as small spontaneous prayers throughout the day. I try to pray the rosary every day, especially when I'm driving or exercising, and I haven't had my radio on in the car in almost two years. Instead, I pray while I drive.

Defibrillator Update:

The Defibrillators are up in our churches, two in Shepherd and two in Irishtown. No one has told me if they're interested in being trained, so I'll schedule a training session on Saturday August 6 and a time to be determined. The company who we purchased them from has offered to train us free of charge on a Saturday, so I'll check with them next week as to what time works best for them.