

From the Deacon's Desk

Gospel Today:

A few weeks ago I mentioned that in the Gospel of the sower, Jesus invited his disciples to go outside the house with him before he started teaching, which meant that his teaching was meant for everyone, and publically he wanted everyone to hear it. In today's Gospel, Jesus takes the disciples back into the house because what he has to teach them is meant for their ears only.

Someone once said: "What we see depends mainly on what we look for," and "We don't see people the way they are... we see people the way we are." Jesus saw things differently than most people do, so he was able to see God present everywhere and in everyone, and in a sense, he was able to see the world as filled with the hidden treasures of God.

Jesus told stories of God, which were really stories of people, and all of Jesus' parables are about God, but a God who lives concealed and revealed in the everyday lives of people. So Jesus talks about farmers and fields, and buying and selling things, and a woman in the kitchen making bread, and a father who had two rotten children, and a mother or father who had a sick child... and the stories go on and on. All the stories are about God, who lives hidden and revealed in the lives of people.

One of my favorite spiritual thinkers of all time, a Jesuit by the name of Karl Rahner (probably the greatest Catholic theologian of the 20th century) was once asked to sum up the Christian message in a few words. Rahner said this: "God dwells in you."

In the Gospel parable today, Jesus talks about the person who found a treasure buried in the field, or the merchant who finds a pearl of great price, and they sell all they have to buy it.

I'm always looking for creative ways to interpret the scriptures, and someone once said that Sacred Scripture is like the Greek delicacy Baklava, which is made with 122 layers of thinly, finely placed dough, one layer upon another. In other words, scripture has many layers and applications for those who peel back its various layers, and look for deeper interpretations.

Going back to the parable about the treasure buried in the field, the person who finds the hidden treasure must buy the field first, because according to Rabbinic Law, the buried treasure legally belonged to the owner of the field. The worker needs to buy the field for the treasure to be his, otherwise, the treasure would belong to someone else.

I'd like to suggest that we are the treasure that Jesus has found, and Jesus has bought the field with his life, death, and resurrection. The "field" is really a symbol for the earth and all in it, which belongs to the God who made it. Jesus intends for his disciples to understand just how precious we all are, and he needs for his disciples to begin understanding why he treats and sees people the way he does. In doing so he wants his disciples to begin seeing others the same way. We know ultimately that Jesus "buys" the rights to the field by his life and passion, and in doing so, we his treasure belong to him in a way that never existed before he died and rose to new life...for us!

You've probably heard popular idioms such as "he bought the farm," or "are you buying this," or "I'm buying into this," which means we are investing 110% percent of ourselves into something. Such idioms are used in situations where persons have taken a great risk and have rearranged their lives for something they believed in, and at any cost. Another similar saying or idiom/maxim is: "She/he has rolled the dice," meaning that someone had taken a chance, risked the unknown, and put their very selves on the line. Jesus buys the farm because he wants the treasure he has discovered (you and me) to belong to him, and he is willing to die for the price of the field.

About 20 years ago I happened upon a story by a former bishop of Saginaw, and I've been carrying the story around ever since. Little did I know then that one day I'd be ordained for the Diocese of Saginaw. Funny how God's providence works sometimes.

A bishop of a popular Michigan diocese once asked a group of Catholics:

“What is the holiest place in the world?” He used Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, as his example. The mosque there is a shrine. Moslems are sure God dwells there—this is the holiest place in the world for them. They visit, make pilgrimages, and walk around it five times a day. They pray facing that shrine.

Then the Bishop asked: “What is the holiest place in Christianity?” And then he offered an answer: “You,” he said, “you are the holiest spot in our church. You have the entire God within you. This is the Good News, our treasure. I just want you to know how good you are.”

Whole Community Catechesis:

Last week we began to pass out brochures on Whole community Catechesis which will begin in October on the first Sunday of the month. Whole Community Catechesis aims at promoting what the bishops of the world have been saying for years now, that faith formation and catechesis are meant to be lifelong and ongoing.

We never graduate from learning more about God and our faith. Just as everything about us matures and grows as we get older, from understanding ourselves better, to relationship dynamics, to science and business matters, so too we are meant to grow and mature in our understanding of what faith is all about. If our image of God and faith is the same as it was when we were teenagers, we have some studying left to do. In fact the Church now teaches that Adult Faith Formation is the focus of all others forms of religious education, and Adult Faith Formation should be the hub around which every other form of faith formation/catechesis/religious education flows. Whole Community Catechesis is a way to promote lifelong faith formation for everyone in the parish, old and young, and everyone in between.

On the first Sunday of each month, everyone is invited to the hall for a sit-down breakfast together followed by an hour of age-appropriate learning and catechesis. After breakfast, kids will go off with their catechists and adults will stay with Jerry or another adult facilitator in the hall. We will all be discussing the same topic of faith, but at our age appropriate levels. What I would say to a child about death and resurrection is different than what I'd say to a 50 year old about it. So we will all be talking about the same faith topic, but at our own maturity level.

Hopefully these “church/faith discussions” will carry over into the homes of those who have children, but even if you're single or have no children at home, you can still participate in the adult discussion at Whole Community Catechesis.

- Whole Community Catechesis **will not** replace our regular faith formation program the rest of the month, only on the first Sunday of the month.
- Whole Community Catechesis **will not** replace our other programs of faith formation like Alpha, or the newer programs which will be discussed in the fall.
- There is **no cost** for Whole Community Catechesis, and you **will not** need to register, and attendance **will not** 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.

If you happen to be one of the parishioners who like to attend Mass on Saturday evening, you are still invited to join us on Sunday morning for breakfast and catechesis. Whole Community Catechesis flows from the Eucharistic Table to the family table, so we need participants to attend Mass somewhere, even if it's not at St. Vincent's on Sunday morning.

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

February 4th – Lent

March 4th – Easter Triduum

April 1st – Death & Resurrection

May 6th – Eucharist