

From the Deacon's Desk

Maple Syrup Evangelization Table:

We are having an Evangelization and Catholic Information Table at the Maple Syrup Festival this year. It will be located down the main hallway in the high school atrium area. A number of parishioners will be there to pass out flyers on Catholicism and what we believe as Christians, so if you happen to see our table and parishioners, stop by to say hi and show your support.

Faith Formation Survey:

I've asked Mary Moomey to send out a survey asking for input regarding our current faith formation practices for children (prekindergarten through high school). Only a fraction of our parishioners participate in our faith formation opportunities and we would like to know if we are meeting your religious education needs. Parents and guardians may look for the survey by the beginning of May.

CSA:

Our Catholic Services Appeal will begin next weekend. You should be receiving a packet from the diocese in the mail, and at each Mass next weekend we will listen to a brief talk by a member of the Finance Council.

Whole Community Catechesis:

Next Sunday is our last Whole Community Catechesis session for the school year. Our topic for discussion will be Eucharist & Sending Forth. As we gather each Sunday as a Eucharistic people, we are called to be a grateful people, and we are sent from Eucharist each Sunday with a mission. Our mission is the same as the mission of Jesus: To build the kingdom of God with our daily words and actions. We will discuss practical ideas of how to accomplish that in our ordinary lives.

Years ago we thought that church membership and discipleship simply had to do with our private, individual relationships with God. Today we realize that our call to be disciples has to do with God and us individually, and then **EVERYONE ELSE WE MEET!**

The word that you and I will be hearing for the rest of our lives is "Evangelization." Evangelization means moving from being *maintenance* parishes (just doing the same old thing for those who walk through our doors and come to us), to *mission* parishes, which means finding ways to invite non-believers and non-Catholics to join us. Statistically, about 70% of Catholic do not practice their Catholic faith on a regular basis. Can you image what we could accomplish in Jesus' name if we somehow brought in those marginalized Catholics from the fringes of our society and culture?

The Catholic Church has been called the "Sleeping Giant" of evangelization, and that means if each and every one of us would take seriously the need to spread our faith, we could set the world on fire with the Good News of Jesus Christ, just like the first Christians did. It's no longer just the work of the priests, sisters, and bishops. Part of the problem is the new culture we find ourselves in. Whereas in years gone by, the culture helped spread the basics of Jewish-Christian faith, simply by how the culture operated. The culture supported religious values in the neighborhoods, on TV, through extended families, and even in public schools. Today the Church is left on its own. For whatever reasons, many Catholics or would-be believers have even compartmentalized God or see God as nonexistent or irrelevant to everyday life.

We have always done a wonderful job at welcoming people who walk through the doors of our churches, but what about the people who don't come to us? What about those who don't walk through our doors, and how will they ever get to know Jesus if we don't go out to meet them? Instead, we wait for them to come to us? Jesus and the early Christians **went out into the world** to "save people." How are we doing that? Someone once said, Catholic Evangelization isn't about bringing people into our churches, but it's about getting

Catholic's *out of church into the world* with the message of the Good News. Join us next Sunday as we talk about possible ways to be disciples and evangelize.

Gospel Today:

Every time I think seriously about Jesus, I always come to the same conclusion; I don't know Jesus anywhere as well as I should. You see, Jesus is the one who changed everything. A lot of people talk about changing the world, but Jesus actually did. It is impossible to measure the impact that he has had on the world, and the truth is, you'll never make sense of the world until you place Jesus at the center of it.

He made the lame walk, taught the simple, set captives free, gave sight to the blind, fed the hungry, healed the sick, comforted the afflicted, and he afflicted the comfortable. And then, in the ultimate act of love, he laid down his life for us, dying for our sins, and then, as if all that wasn't enough, he rose from the dead.

The more I get to know Jesus, the more I get to know my true self, and this is what I discover; I am the lame that Jesus makes walk. I am the simple that Jesus patiently teaches. I am the captive that Jesus wants to set free. I am the blind that Jesus wants to give life to. I'm the hungry that Jesus wants to feed. I'm the sick that he wants to heal. I'm the afflicted that Jesus wants to comfort, and at other times, I'm the comfortable that he wants to afflict. Jesus is the healer of my soul. And my soul needs healing. And if you're honest with yourself, I think you'll discover that your soul needs healing too.

In today's Gospel Jesus talks about himself being the "true vine" and we are the branches. In the Old Testament, Israel is pictured as the vineyard of God. "I planted you as a choice vine" God tells them through the prophet Jeremiah. "Israel is a luxuriant vine" says Hosea. The vine was the national emblem of Israel, if you like – it appeared on the coins of the Maccabees, and there was a famous golden vine on the front of the Holy Place in the Temple.

But although the nation of Israel might consider itself as God's vine or vineyard, Hebrew Scripture references actually use the example *not to praise* the faithfulness of God's people, *but to berate* the nation for being unfruitful; for being a vineyard that had run wild and was bedraggled, and now desperately in need of pruning. Jesus hints at this when he says that he is the true vine to which the branches are connected, and his Father the gardener. The Jews considered themselves to be a highly favored people. But one of the problems with being a member of God's chosen people (or indeed to call ourselves Christians) is that there's a tendency to take a lot for granted – like it doesn't matter what you do or say or how you behave because you're favored by God and he'll look after you.

But that's not how Jesus saw things. Being Jews (or Christians) and considering themselves a branch of God's true vine was not enough. Their lives were not showing that fruitfulness that comes with commitment. In fact, their lives reflected the opposite because of their behavior. Nothing external makes someone right with God, only the closeness of fellowship that is there when God's love, shown through Jesus, is present in lives. In today's Gospel Jesus says: "*Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*" In today's gospel he uses the word "remain" eight times.

Christianity is all about a relationship, between God and us as individuals and the rest of the community. We need to stay interconnected with God and the wider church. It's a difficult world to be Christian in. There are so many distractions, so many other voices demanding our attention and diverting or pulling us away from "the vine" which is the source of our spiritual nourishment. And without that nourishment we're likely to wither, become weak and indecisive Christians. That is not being fruitful because it does not show to the world the joy and hope that is ours.

Only Jesus living in us can produce the fruit of the Spirit. God expects to see likeness to Jesus Christ. He examines our lives and expects to see love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and self-control. The fruit that Jesus talks about is the righteousness of God in the heart. It is the likeness of Christ.