

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time (C), June 20, 2010

I'd like to begin this morning with a little story. It seems there were nine young soldiers who had received overnight passes from their base camp. When morning came, however, not one of those nine was present. Finally, an hour after they were supposed to report, the first soldier straggled back to camp. He was immediately taken to the company commander. "I'm sorry I was late sir," the soldier said, "but I had a date, lost track of time, and missed the last bus back. But I wanted to make it back on time so I took a taxi. But about halfway back to camp, the cab broke down, so I went to a nearby farm and bought a horse. But as I was riding back her on the horse, the animal suddenly fell to the ground and died. So I did the last miles on foot, and here I am. Well, the company commander was pretty skeptical about that weird chain of excuses, but he finally let the young soldier off with just a mild lecture about the virtue of being on time.

However, in short succession, there were seven more stragglers who reported in, one by one, and each one had the same story! They had a date, lost track of time, missed the last bus, took a cab, cab broke down, bought a horse, horse fell dead. And finally, the ninth and last soldier arrived. And by now the commander was totally exasperated and growled at him, "What happened to you?" The ninth soldier replied, "Sir, I had a date, lost track of time, missed the last bus, hired a taxi..." "Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" the officer cried. Are you going to tell me that the cab broke down?" "No, sir," the soldier replied. "The taxi was fine. The problem is that we couldn't get through. The whole road was clogged with dead horses."

They couldn't get through! That's my theme for today – not getting through. We have a tremendous Christian message: words of wisdom and hope, about love and forgiveness and healing. We have a great heritage, people of courage and compassion, who have built schools and hospitals and shelters, who lived lives of service and outreach to people in need and who have spoken out courageously for the outcast and forgotten – I could go on for a long time -- but the message too often doesn't get through. Sometimes I think that part of the problem is that we live out the wrong part of today's gospel message. Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do YOU say that I am?" And after Peter says "You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Holy One, the Son of the Living God," Jesus then "***Sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone!***" That's the WRONG part of the gospel to pay attention to!! Once Jesus rose from the dead he commanded us to tell the whole world! And the early Christians did that – otherwise we wouldn't be here this morning.

Over the past year our staff and Pastoral Council have read this book, which I have quoted from before, entitled "Reclaim the Fire" In the first chapter the author offers this somber reflection: "We are no longer a growing Church. We are a declining Church and a graying Church. Some years ago George Gallup used the image of "a sleeping giant" to describe the Catholic Church. He was trying to say: You Catholics have so much potential for good in this society. You have the largest membership of any church in America (some 60 million). You have clear teachings, a rich spirituality, visible organization, and leadership. But you are asleep. You are not having the spiritual impact on society that you could have – and the nation is the poorer for it."

And before any of our minds go off grumbling about the institutional Church, and all the problems that our hierarchy has had, I want to point out, first, that Mr. Gallup's quote predates the recent troubles our hierarchy has had; and secondly, that Catholic leadership in this country is not solely up to the hierarchy. Our Vice President is Catholic, 6 of 9 Supreme Court Justices, and nearly 30% of Congress, more than any other religious body, more than twice the number of Baptists or Methodists, three times the number of Episcopalians or Presbyterians, four times the

number of Jews, nine times the number of Mormons, and once you start looking at the various evangelical Christian churches... well, we have more than all the rest of those combined. We have an unprecedented potential for good in our society, and the world. But I agree with Mr. Gallup. Too often it's like we're asleep.

Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do YOU say that I am?" Do we have an answer? Do WE have a personal relationship with the living Jesus Christ? I'm not talking about the historical Jesus. That Jesus is only someone we read about, or see a statue of. I'm talking about the living One we encounter in the Word, the One whose flesh we eat and drink at Eucharist, the One who is actually with us whenever two or three of us is gathered in his name, the One we meet when we feed the hungry or shelter the homeless. If that doesn't enliven our heart, fill us with joy, and compel us to share the great news ... then maybe it's more like that guy in the cab who couldn't get through ... maybe the message just isn't getting through, not only not getting through to others but maybe *not getting through to us*.

The subtitle of this book is "A parish guide to Evangelization." There's that scary word, *evangelization*. I know that most of you don't like that word. If I were to try to pull together a parish evangelization committee after Mass today without explaining what I mean, I know I just wouldn't get very many takers. Part of it might be the image in your mind of a street corner evangelist. Or maybe you've had a pair of Jehovah Witnesses come to your door and you thought, "Boy is THAT weird." Maybe you just feel it's too showy or pompous to talk about your faith. Or perhaps you just don't like the controversy that conversations about faith can cause.

But think about this story that I heard this past week. This is a true story. One of our preteens, whose family is generally here almost every Sunday, went to a neighboring church for a change, only because they knew some of the people there, and it's just around the corner from their home. And her mom was absolutely shocked because that young lady SANG in church. She said, "When she's here at St. Bridget, she sings like this: ... (virtually inaudible) ... but in that church she actually sang out, because *everybody else* in the place was singing too!"

Evangelization is like singing! **Enthusiasm is contagious!** Evangelization is not about shaming people into conversion. It's not about stealing from other faiths. And it's NOT about trying to fill up empty pews. In the very first and most important place, *evangelization is about growing in our own relationship with Jesus Christ.*

I know that St. Bridget parishioners, above almost any other parish I could name, place an extremely high value on education, and not only for our young people. Most adults here have readily attended continuing education seminars and workshops to keep up with professional lives, but ... how much do we do to inform and enrich our spiritual life? Some. Too little. And if we adults do not take the time to be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about our faith, we have no reason to expect that our children will either.

"Who is it that you say that I am?" Do yourself a favor... and let that question haunt you a bit today, and over this next week. After all, Jesus asks that question of his closest friends. And he asks you that question, today, here at this Eucharist.

Deacon Denny Duffell