

OK, if you get bored during my homily, slap your neighbor. See if they turn the other cheek. If not, raise your hand and let me know.

In his book called HEAVEN IN STONE AND GLASS, Bishop Robert Barron writes about the building of churches through the centuries. He includes this: "There is a wonderful description of the construction of Chartres Cathedral that has come down to us from the 12th century. It says that people from all walks of life and social strata – lords, ladies, soldiers, and common workers -- came together in the grueling task of transporting stones, wine, grain, and oil to the work site. They labored side by side and in reverential silence – and all forgave their enemies. What we see here is a hint of the new city – the heavenly Jerusalem -- made possible by the authority of the Risen Christ at work in His Church. When we visit a church and move into its space, it is the true God that we are meant to praise and this new world that we are compelled to imagine." (freely adapted from CONNECTIONS SUNDAY, March 7, 2021)

It's a great description of the brief image we have from Paul in the letter to the Ephesians we just heard: "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.....built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." (Eph 2:19-22) Elsewhere Paul speaks of us as 'living stones.'

Among those wonderful souls who joined Fr. Bill Schmidt, Fr. Joe Cavoto, and Sr. Anne Heath -- and began this community, some still walk among us. (Please stand if you worshiped at St. Andrew's before the church was built). You continue to bless us with your presence, prayer, participation, and wisdom. THANK YOU for giving this parish such a wonderful foundation. Those of you who were present for the dedication of this building, please stand. You watched this roof be raised and the cross upon which it rests, and then saw this altar and walls sealed with chrism by Bishop Gossman. THANK YOU!

If you have just joined the parish in the last 5 years, please stand. You are part of our present and future. THANK YOU for joining this long line of people who have come here for 4 decades and sought and stumbled, found faith and lost it again, were touched by God and overwhelmed by His grace, and who have striven, however haltingly, to live a life that follows Jesus Christ.

Because Jesus Christ is raised from the dead, we are called, like Him, to launch out into the world to say to everyone, "Come on in!" Jesus commissioned the 12, and then folks like you and me to go forth and say, "Come on in!" As Pope Paul VI said "The Church exists to evangelize." It exists for the sake of those outside of these walls. Which reminds me of the priest who wanted to implement a program designed to help his congregation to be friendlier to visitors. He announced that they would start this new program the following Sunday. But one man was so enthusiastic about the idea that he grabbed the hand of a lady sitting next to him and greeted her. She gave him an icy stare and told him in no uncertain terms, "That friendliness business doesn't start until next week." (DYNAMIC PREACHING, July-Sept 2003, p. 73)

But the Church exists not for itself but rather to sign, signal, and embody God's intentions for the whole world. God wants to say to the world "Come on in!" God's primary means of accomplishing this is through parishes like St. Andrew's. The community, its corporate life, is called to embody an alternative order that stands as a sign of God's redemptive purposes in the world. Our church, parish, despite our constant failings, is the way God has chosen to invite the people of this area to come be part of God's family. We are

not allowed to turn inward, to focus only upon ourselves; we are forced to turn outward because that's what Christ did and does. The great missionary evangelist Lesslie Newbigin said "....the coming of Jesus has introduced into history an event in which the reign of God is made known under the form of weakness and foolishness to those whom God has chosen to make it known, andit is made known to them so that it may be proclaimed to all." (THE OPEN SECRET)

Even as Israel was called in its unique life together to be a light to the nations, so the church is called to be a light to the world. It is not for the church to save the world, but God's saving of the world includes the church. Thus, evangelization and service include inclusion into the church. To proclaim Christ is to proclaim His embodiment; to give our life to Christ is to be joined to His Body, the church. A Christian outside the church is an incomprehensible anomaly. A church that is not constantly converting, calling, incorporating, evangelizing, is not Christ's church. What is evangelization? It's what the church says to people – COME ON IN – because Christ has come to them. One of our great challenges as Christians is to be a community that is answerable to a God whose nature it is to be the Good Shepherd, out seeking and saving the lost. If we could be Christ's church only by coming here, loving one another, and praising God with the folks we like, we wouldn't need to be out saying to the people in the name of Christ, 'Come on in.' (COME ON IN, PULPIT RESOURCE, April-June 2021, p. 16-17)

Second, the church equips us to share good news, and it does so by all of these ways – and more. There are 12 subpoints in this second point. CONFUSED? YOU'RE WELCOME! Look, Jesus had 12 disciples and He didn't explain either!

- 1) The Church helps us think about matters that, for all sorts of reasons, are difficult to think about in this culture. Like what am I supposed to do with my one, wonderful life?
- 2) The church provides a lifetime of preparation for death, always doing so in the light of the resurrection.
- 3) The Church is a primary location where we deal with losses and seek healing for the pain of loss
- 4) The rituals of the church provide for the public processing of our fears and our sorrows, setting our anxieties in the context of the full sweep of the Christian faith, reminding us that others have faced the same things – and have come through them -- with faith in Christ and help from the Church for 2000 years.
- 5) In the church's rituals and liturgy, we actively practice and encourage remembrance and lovingly guard and reiterate tradition as we corporately submit to judgment by the witness of the saints. We could call it just a coincidence that the Mass intention this evening is for Jim Boyle, one of the original church building committee members, or recognize the hand of God reminding us of those generous, holy founders who made this parish possible. And as an aside here, while I was working on this homily on Friday morning, Noelle, Carole, Melissa and Peggy all walked into my office with the heads of Sr. Anne, Fr. Bill Schmidt, Fr. David Fitzgerald, and me – on STICKS! I reminded them that I had once pastored St. Thomas More parish in Chapel Hill – and Thomas ended up with HIS head on a stick -- next to the Tower of London. In case any of you want to get your pictures taken with this notorious cast of characters, you can do so after Mass at our party.
- 6) The church is where we tell stories, giving and receiving testimony from the living and the dead about the way to a life worth living.
- 7) The Church is a place for confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- 8) The church is a place of thoughtful, imaginative reflection on our lives and our future.

- 9) The church is where we receive our vocations, where we accept our assignments in the mission of Jesus Christ, and where we are commissioned to participate in His moves in the world that He is saving.
- 10) The Church is where we find grace and Sabbath rest and we are reminded that we are more than our desires to produce, to control, to consume, and to be independent.
- 11) The church is where we are given the grace and the time to look back and sense God at work and where we take time to attend to one another.
- 12) In the Church we help one another name and claim our God-given gifts as we encourage one another to live and share the Good News of what God has done for us in Christ. (adapted from Will Willimon, PASTORING FOR LIFE – AGING, GROWING OLD IN CHURCH, p. 131-132)

Third and finally, we hear so often about the hypocrisy of the church. What in the world do we expect? We are members of the church based on the same standards which Jesus used for His own disciples. Which means that among us are found liars, adulterers, thieves, gossips, misers, and rogues. If we can't stand the company, we need not apply. The Bible is clear that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, He came only to call sinners to new life in His Kingdom. And we are ALL sinners. That's who this church is for. We sinners are the ones for whom He died. Don't bother about worthiness. We're all a mess. But God loves a mess. The poet Kathleen Norris sums up parish/church life like this: "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." Which reminds me of the husband and wife who were leaving church after Sunday Mass. "Did you see that designer suit on the woman in front of us?" the wife asked. "She must have spent a fortune on it – I wonder how much she gives in the collection. And that ridiculous hat on the woman across the aisle? And the awful toupee on the guy sitting on your left?" "Well, no," the husband confessed. "I'm afraid I dozed off." She gave him a sharp look. "A lot of good church does you!"

And to finish up with Norris' remarks: "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 mornings, including the pastor, I am there because I need to be reminded that love can be at the center of all things, if we only keep it there...I am profoundly moved by the hospitality of Cecil Williams, the pastor of Glide Memorial 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 GLIDE, we don't ask them if they are atheists, Methodists, or Buddhists. We ask them what their names are and how they're doing.'" (THE CLOISTER WALK, p. 346-348).

That should be our parish community, leaving to the angels at the end of time the task of judging the dragnet of our gathering. For the moment it's enough just to know one another's names and ask how they are doing. And keep on saying COME ON IN. We'd love to have you join our motley mess! Let the Church say AMEN. (help from William J. Bausch, THE PARISH OF THE NEXT MILLENNIUM, p. 224)