

Here is a piece in honor of Father's Day. Brian Doyle writes: "I came to the shelves on which resided ever so many brightly colored pull-up pants, and there I paused and pitched camp for several long moments, and gazed happily upon the myriad offerings with pleasure and amusement and genuine nostalgia, so much so that another dad walking by laughed, because we knew without speaking that we were cousins in the clan of men who have wrestled pull-up pants on and off their small children, and specified in no uncertain terms that you may NOT wear your pull-up pants on your head, and you may NOT both wear pull-up pants on your heads like rustling helmets and have a jousting match with brooms, and you may NOT sell your Bert pull-up pants to your brother for a quarter because he wants the Bert pants and not the Ernie pants and it was HIS turn for the Ernie pants and Dad is ICKY and life is ICKY and he is appealing to a higher court who says with her usual blunt maternal grace that if he does not climb into those Bert pants in three seconds or less he will be sentenced to ELMO pants, and no man in his right mind wishes to be seen in Elmo pull-up pants.

"Many is the time, brothers and sisters, many is the time I stalked this very aisle looking for pull-up pants with certain beloved faces on them and NOT certain other faces, and staggered back to the checkout girl with not one but two massive bales of pull-up pants as vast as the bales of cotton once carried by groaning mules in the steaming fields of Mississippi, and paid handsomely for the privilege of bringing the bales home and having children use them fast and furious for all sorts of purposes, including sometimes the one for which they were designed; but also the pull-up pants were braided into an incredible rope to save one boy who was lost in the sea of the rug while the other one was steering the boat of his bed, and once the pull-up pants were wrestled heroically onto the leg of the dog before they (the pull-up pants) were shredded beyond recognition into so many tiny scraps that the vacuum cleaner gagged and died; and pull-up pants adorned basketballs and footballs and soccer balls, and they were the subject of many piercing questions about Dad's childhood, such as did people even HAVE pull-up pants that long ago, before fire was invented?.....(EIGHT WHOPPING LIES, p. 45-47) HAPPY FATHER'S DAY! We'll have a special blessing for you at the end of Mass.

OK, let's dig into this gospel. First notice that Matthew NAMES each of the 12 apostles. Names are the most important of all words in the Bible. There are many genealogies, long lists of ancestral names, and we find them the most boring passages, but our ancestors found them the most important ones. Because these proper names name the only things in the universe that have the image of God, the only things that have immortal souls, and the only things that have absolute or intrinsic value rather than just relative or instrumental value. They are persons; everything else are just things. Things are to be used, persons are to be loved, and God is to be adored. Many in our culture get this all mixed up. They love things, they adore persons, and they use God. We are to use things, love persons, and adore God. That's sanity, it's realism; that's living in reality, treating everything as it really is. Sanctity and sanity are really identical.

Second, these 12 people were ordinary people, not yet saints, but they were entrusted with the most serious of all human tasks, matters of life or death – eternal life or death. We do something similar in the legal order when we choose 12 ordinary people to deal with matters of life or death when they sit on a jury at a murder trial.

The 12 apostles are Jesus' first clergy. But these special people do not REMOVE from the rest of the baptized the task of being missionaries and evangelists: they REMIND us all of our task. They show us in a special way what we are all called to be, just as the specially sacred place inside a church building sanctifies all places, and as the specially sacred time of the Mass sanctifies all times. Priests do not offer the Mass in place of the folks in the pews but WITH the folks in the pews. Priests do not offer the Mass in place of the persons in the pews but in their name. Priests represent all the folks spiritually, as our government officials represents

us politically. Representation is a kind of presence, a re-present-ing. The pew potatoes are not absent but present in the clergy as well as in our Congress. Priests and congresspersons do not decrease our responsibility. They increase it, by showing it more clearly.

Third, these 12 began the mission after they were commissioned by Jesus at the end of Matthew's gospel: "Make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt 28:18-20).

This is called the 'Great Commission.' Please notice that Jesus did not add, "These words apply to clergy only." Jesus was commissioning ALL of His disciples to be missionaries and evangelists. We all preach either the Gospel or the anti-Gospel not only by our words but also, and most powerfully, by our deeds. The Gospel that converted the hard-nosed Roman Empire was not first of all beautiful words but beautiful deeds, deeds of love. People can argue with words, but we can't argue with deeds, with lives, with saints. (all of this freely adapted from Kreeft, FOOD FOR THE SOUL, Cycle A, p. 520-522)

Fourth! (Come on, I only had 2 points last week, I owed you one! And you're not going to die, I promise!) How do we DO this?

We need to remember that sharing the good news of Jesus doesn't require that we have memorized great answers to questions in a catechism. It's about what's in our heart; how we live our lives; how we treat our fellow human beings that is the essence of how we share our faith in Christ. And it means that we LOVE Christ. As Pope Benedict put it in his encyclical DEUS CARITAS EST: "The beginning of Christian existence is not an ethical decision or a sublime idea, but rather the encounter....with a person who gives life a new goal and, at the same time, a sure growth." Only if we love God-in-Christ can we then share that love with others.

There was a barber who thought that he should share his faith with his customers more than he had been doing. So he decided that he would witness to the first man who walked into his shop that morning. Soon a man came in and said, "I want a shave." The barber went into the back and prayed a quick, desperate prayer, saying, "Lord please give me the wisdom to know just the right thing to say to him. Amen." Then the barber came out with his razor knife in one hand and a Bible in the other while saying, "Good morning, sir. I have a question for you.....Are you ready to die?" I don't recommend that approach. Just saying!

Evangelization has to do with being our natural, usual self, trying our best to live out our faith in a humble, kind, and helpful way. It's something everyone of us – from the youngest to the oldest – can do. A priest tells this story. It was a week before Christmas. The bus was filled with the noise and chaos that only 28 freshman boys can create. We were returning from a wrestling meet, yet another loss in a long string for my team. As usual, the team had taken the loss hard – for about 12 seconds.

The meet had finished later than expected, and it was way past dinnertime as I drove our bus out of the little town of Snohomish that December night. Stomachs rumbling, the boys began to plead with me to find a restaurant for a dinner stop.

Now, I know firsthand what 28 boys can do to a restaurant, so I ignored them and kept driving. But it was Christmas, and when they began to chant in unison, 'Priest brutality, priest brutality!' my heart melted. I pulled the bus into the parking lot of the next restaurant along the freeway and prayed the boys would be on their best behavior.

When we trooped in the door, the café staff exchanged nervous glances. Some of the patrons asked for the checks and headed for the doors. But a restaurant isn't a church, and I couldn't ask 28 boys not to talk.

When you have that many boys in one confined space for a meal, you simply have to expect a certain level of noise, motion, and play. And sure enough, while we waited for our meal to be served, the boys built castles out of the salt and pepper shakers, constructed pea shooters out of the paper placemats, and experimented with the ketchup to see who could come up with the worst looking face wound.

Two disapproving waitresses began to serve the boys their pizzas. As the team surveyed the food and jockeyed for position, a student yelled over the din – loud enough to be heard clearly back at the high school – “Hey Father! Say grace so we can eat!”

The chaos suddenly ceased. It was a marvelous moment, a powerful moment, a Christmas moment. The restaurant became all at once a veritable oasis of peace, calm, and spirituality as quiet settled gently over the room. It was as if we had entered the eye of a hurricane. Mothers in the neighboring booths quieted their children. Waitresses froze in their tracks. Men removed their baseball caps, and the sounds of a busy restaurant came to a halt. Every head in the place turned and fixed on those 28 freshman boys as they momentarily stopped fooling around and bowed their heads for grace. I wanted to crawl underneath the table and out of sight. Instead, I prayed in a loud voice for God to bless our pizzas, the people who had prepared and served them, and all those in the restaurant at that moment. When the last word of the blessing faded, my young saints-for-a-moment returned to their banter, grabbing slices of pizza and crying out, “Who has the pepperoni?”

Boys don’t eat pizza, they inhale it. When they had consumed every last scrap, including the crusts, I went over to the counter to pay the bill. To my surprise, the hostess told me that someone had already paid our tab, including the tip. When I asked who, the hostess pointed to an older gentleman sitting in a booth by himself near the back.

Grateful, but puzzled, I went over to thank him. We talked for a few minutes. He asked where we were from, curious about what kind of school prompted kids to say grace in public before having pizza. When I told him that we were a Catholic school, he simply nodded. I asked him what had prompted his generosity, and he mumbled something about ‘it being Christmas and all.’ But I saw tears in his eyes.

I thanked him again and then shepherded my young flock out of the restaurant and back onto the bus for the trip home.

Three weeks later, a letter arrived at school addressed to ‘the priest in charge of the wrestling team.’ It was from our benefactor in the restaurant. It read in part, “Father, 3 weeks ago you thanked me for what I did for you and the boys. I couldn’t find the words that night, but it was I who wanted to thank all of you.” He went on to explain that he was a Catholic who hadn’t seen the inside of a church since the baptism of his second child nearly 60 years before. What he had witnessed in the restaurant that night brought back memories of the time when he, too, had been 15 – a time when prayer, faith, and church had been a meaningful part of his life. He didn’t share with me why he had abandoned these spiritual anchors, but he did say that our prayer had rekindled in him a desire to reconnect with God and church.

There was no catechism, no preaching, nothing formal at all. Just a bunch of teenage boys being teenage boys – but with enough faith to stop for a moment at a meal and ask God to bless it. And another life was blessed, and faith kindled – or rekindled.

We have thousands of opportunities like this every day – and it is our humble, honest, kind and compassionate acts that turn heads and hearts – and bring others to the Christ we love. That’s how we go and make disciples. So may it be for you and for me. Amen. (story is not attributed, sounds like William O’Malley)

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