

In recent months, AT&T has been running a series of catchy ads and came up with the catchphrase “Just OK is not OK.” The ads feature a physician who was just reinstated giving a pep talk to a patient that he has no need to worry as they’d “figure it out” in the operating room, and a shady accountant who recently took a new name who’s clearly about do so some illegal things for his client.

They are pretty good ads and it’s a great phrase, but I think it’s also quite applicable to how we live the Christian life too. Because sometimes we can be satisfied being “just OK.” We think hey, I go to Mass every week, I’m overall a pretty good person, so what else do I need to do?

Here’s the thing though. While we should not doubt how much God loves us, that love requires a response. And God is calling us to not just be OK, but to spiritual greatness.

Two hundred years ago, a young man named Samuel Mazzuchelli, came to realize that call, and decided to make a radical decision in his life, to become a priest, and to travel to a distant far off.

Born in 1806, the son of a wealthy and well positioned family in Rome of merchants and bankers, he could have led a very comfortable life. His family was rather alarmed when he joined the Dominicans, but they understood it was what he felt called to do, and so at 17 years of age he becomes a Dominican, and at 22 years of age a sub-deacon, one of the old minor orders the Church used to have before Vatican II.

It was also at age 22 he sails across the Atlantic and comes to America to serve in the diocese of Cincinnati. At the time, this diocese covered all of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin. And also there was a huge priest shortage; hardly any priests were outside of Cincinnati. As such, the bishop of Cincinnati, Edward Fenwick, petitions to have him ordained early, and at 23 he is ordained and gets to work, essentially being one of the only priests for these areas covering five states.

He goes to Mackinac Island where a Catholic Church was built by the Jesuits but abandoned since 1765, as they were suppressed until 1814. So this parish was without a priest for 2 generations, but was still doing well as priests visited when they could. A house was built for him and he would work with natives and settlers.

But Fr. Samuel took it up a notch. Rather than just minister to the Catholics who were there, he also reached out to Presbyterians and Methodists, despite some of them being hostile to him. William Ferry was an anti-Catholic preacher, who gave lectures he hoped would inspire people to leave Catholicism. Fr. Samuel saw this and gave counter lectures defending the faith and he invited all to come, Catholic and Protestant. Ferry declined, but many did come. He had warmth and humor and inspired people; one Protestant minister said “despite the characteristics of Italians of his rank, the softness, refinement and luxury background he has, Fr. Mazzuchelli is fine to take food and room with an Indian and adapt to the conditions of the place to propagate the Church of Rome; he is a true servant of His Master Christians would be good to imitate.” Protestants began to respect him, and some even converted because he didn’t ignore them but engaged them.

And speaking of engaging people, he learned the Winnebago language along with French and English. He went to Green Bay and established a parish there in 1831, and learned Chippewa so he could publish a liturgical almanac in their language. He did much of the building himself along with

the architectural design. He'd build a Menominee Native American school as well in Wisconsin, and would also go down to Iowa as well. In all he'd design 20 churches, five of which still stand to this day.

In Iowa, he got the nickname Fr. Matthew Kelly. This was because he ministered to Irish populations there, and his Italian name was hard to pronounce. As such, the Irish took to redoing his last name. He'd go on to become Vicar General of the Dubuque diocese, but would still always be on the move starting a college for young men in Wisconsin and speaking out against the mistreatment of Indians and slavery, all the while administering the sacraments and sometimes hearing confessions for 14 hours a day. He'd die in the field, as in 1864 he contracted pneumonia after visiting a sick person.

In 1993, he was declared venerable by Saint John Paul II, and he is currently on the road to sainthood.

What his story goes to show you is that following Jesus will require us going outside of our comfort zone, because God wants us to go above and beyond just punching a clock of being an overall pretty good person. God

wants to use you and me as an instrument of his love and grace, meaning we don't just grow in holiness ourselves, but we bring it to one another.

In the beautiful first reading from Isaiah, we hear "you are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my mercy." Israel is the chosen people of God. But this isn't to be for their own glory. Rather, they are to share God's glory for a reason. Isaiah continues, they are to be a light to the nations.

What happens though at times is the same thing that happens to so many people; sin divides them, and sometimes they think they are the only ones that matter. It's the same kind of thinking Fr. Samuel encountered from whites who looked down on people of color and Native Americans. They lose sight of the glory of God and what it means. Namely, that it requires a response, (one that may be very difficult), and it requires giving it away to all people.

With respect to that response part, it's what caused Saul to become Paul; to be seized by Jesus and go from persecuting Christians to being one of them. It's what the early apostles saw, recognizing that Jesus was the fulfillment as the long awaited Davidic King and Lord of All nations which is

why they drop their nets and immediately follow Him. And it's what caused a teenager from a wealthy Roman family to leave it all because that's what God wanted him to do. For the Christian, when we see that God comes to us and loves us, we, too, have to take it up a notch. We don't have any idea where we will be led. It will be an adventure, sometimes perilous, that we can't plan for or control. But when we are willing to let go and let God, such amazing things can happen. Who would have known that a young man following God's call would lead to the Catholic Church being established throughout the midwest? So what is God calling you to do beyond just being here this morning? Where is He leading you? Trust in Him, and know that while we don't know where the adventure will take us, we do know that letting His love fill us and seize us will ultimately lead to so much good happening to us and other people. As Pope Francis has said: 'There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills.' 'I have the sense of being in someone else's hands, as though God were taking me by the hand.'

So once God does that and takes control of our lives and gives us direction, what we also must then remember is God's love must flow through us to all people. And that's what led Fr. Samuel to leave Rome and go to the American frontier, and see God in all people. Bishop Robert Barron has said that both our parishes and people must see themselves in missionary terms, meaning we can't fall into the trap of saying I pray, I go to Mass, I'm a decent person, that's enough to save my soul. Why are we doing these things becomes the question, and hopefully it's so that through us, other people will be attracted to Jesus. Think of the parent who passes on the faith to the kids by explaining why they go to Mass, and prays with them and talks about why we pray; they are sharing their joy and helping their child to experience God's love. For all of us, we must remember that we are missionaries too. So we need to ask ourselves how are we doing in that, and be honest with ourselves. Do we exclude people from God's mercy we deem as not holy enough? Do we give up when it's tough and the kids don't want to pray or go to Mass? Do we not talk about our faith because we are worried about what others will think? Do we know how to argue and be an apologist or just how to shout louder than the other person? Do we look for ways to reach out to people who have fallen away from the Church, or to evangelize to people who are of other faiths? All of

these things entail risk and difficulty. But when we share the love that God gives us as His servants, like Fr. Samuel we can do so much to win souls for the Kingdom of God.

The prophet in our first reading says “Israel, you are my servant, but that’s not enough, you are a light to the nations.” In our lives and vocations, let’s take those words to heart, because just OK isn’t OK. God wants us to dream big. As Saint Dominic said, ‘Stored grain rots’. Where might the Lord be sending you and me today? When the waters of the deep threaten to overwhelm us, then, like Peter further on in the adventure, we shall find a firm hand reaching out to lift us back into the safety of the boat. And God will use our hands to bring people into the boat as well that leads home to Him. So, like Venerable Fr Samuel Mazzuchelli, let us not be afraid to strive be something much better than OK, but strive for sainthood and do all we can to help all people obtain the crown of eternal life.