Going the Extra Mile

Festival weekend is finally here, which means great food, fun and fellowship.

As I mentioned in last week's column, I'm sensing that we've finally gotten to a point where we are "back" to enjoying the things that are so important in life, as communal events where people come together for fellowship matter so much.

The list of people to thank would greatly exceed the space constraints of this column, but I'd really like to give a heartfelt thanks to Jordan Ecker, Ann Brown, Jane Schmitz and Laurie Dahlback from our staff for the many hours they put in this past week getting ready for the festival, along with the many hours put in by the Harvest Festival Committee. A big thank you as well to the many people who donated baskets to be auctioned off, and to the small army of volunteers we had calling bingo, setting up and taking things down, serving the meals and doing everything in between.

In this week's readings, we are given a challenge by our Lord, to truly go the extra mile for the Lord; to not just do the bare minimum, but to go above and beyond. My predecessor, Fr. Paul Jarvis, was fond of using the term "pew potato" as a mentality to avoid. Coming to Mass is important; but we want to live out our faith day in and day out. And a big way this happens is through action.

I used the example a few times, but a favorite show of mine is "The Wonder Years" from the late 80s and early 90s; the coming-of-age show set in the 1960s where Kevin Arnold grows up. In a few episodes that took place at the start of the school year, he's overwhelmed by algebra and does not know what to do. Mr. Collins, his teacher, whom Kevin at first sees as really tough and no-nonsense though, works with him and helps him find his talents. When he then seemingly doesn't have time for him (because he knows Kevin can now do it on his own) Kevin angrily says "I thought you were my friend!" to which Mr. Collins says "I'm not your friend Mr. Arnold, I'm your teacher." He angrily intentionally bombs a test, writing smart-allicky comments on it. When Mr. Collins dies suddenly over the weekend, and the substitute says he could not find his teacher, Kevin calmly takes the blank test Mr. Collins had left for him, knowing it was just anger that was coming out on the other test, he calmly takes it, hands it to the assistant principal covering the class and says "you don't have to grade it, it's an A." He does this not in a smug way, but because he put in the time to study and get that A, using the tools Mr. Collins helped him to find.

On our part, we are both Kevin and Mr. Collins.

God has given us so many tools and talents; do we complain about what we don't have like Kevin did at first, or do we fine-tune those talents? Growing into a saint takes work. Much like in Mary Jo Copeland's life, who I quoted a couple of weeks back, she says she wants to be a saint, but she works at this through prayer and action. In our lives, it's worth asking ourselves how do we go the extra mile as well through the hard work in overcoming our sins, in looking at our lives and trying to become better people, in trying

to grow in holiness? We need to discover how to choose good and avoid evil; we need to own up to what we have failed to do and trust in God's mercy, but also have the maturity to learn from these mistakes and become better and better as life goes on.

God has also put us on this world to be Mr. Collins as well. Each of us has the power to be such a great teacher. I think for instance of my parents; mom and dad will be celebrating 46 years of marriage next weekend. I'm so thankful for their vocation and the vocation of marriage. In my life, I've learned from them what it means to be committed to a family; the value of hard work; of sacrifice; of helping others in need; of patience and love. I'm also reminded of this at so many funeral Masses I celebrate when I meet with the families and get to hear the stories of the person who's funeral I'm celebrating, as I learn how often that person went above and beyond for them. As we examine our consciences, it's worth asking how we are serving our loved ones, and using God's gifts. We look at what we do for our families, and how we give back to our parish, our school, our community and world. Let us never forget our actions speak so loudly.

As I've mentioned before, a true joy of being here at Saint Joe's is seeing day in and day out the true vibrancy that is our parish. People love being a part of our parish family, getting to know one another, and enriching one another's lives.

The festival was made possible because people here at Saint Joe's did not just do the bare minimum, but truly went above and beyond as our Lord challenges us to do in this week's Gospel. May this be a way of life for us all as we strive to become saints and help one another to do the same.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul