

One of my favorite football quotes is of an upset Vince Lombardi pleading with the official, "Hey! What the hell (h-e-double hockey sticks) is going on out there?!" How often I say this too when I look at the world and what seems to go on. I'm guessing you've done the same thing a time or two.

But here's the thing. Yes, it's a crazy world we live in. And it's easy to get angry about it. But, how about doing something about it? How about being a true light to the world as Jesus tells us?

Richard Wrumbrand was born in 1909 to a Jewish background family, the youngest of 4 boys in Bucharest, Romania. Gifted intellectually and fluent in 9 languages, he was active in left-wing politics and worked as a stockbroker.

Richard was a militant atheist who opposed all religions. Despite this, he was attracted to churches. Richard was not sure why. One day, he walked to a village, and one person, a carpenter, Christian Wolfkes, gave him a Bible, perhaps sensing that he was searching. As he read the Bible, it came to life like never before. Eventually after he was married, both he and his wife, Sabina Oster, who was also Jewish, converted to Christianity. At which point both of them started to follow Jesus. After this, he became a Lutheran Pastor.

Rev. Richard and his wife Sabina, started passing out tracts to those in Jewish ghettos during World War II. The Wurmbrands were arrested for their work among the Jews. They also wanted to evangelize to the occupying German forces. They preached in bomb shelters and rescued Jewish children out of the ghettos. Richard and Sabina were repeatedly arrested and beaten and, at least once, nearly executed. Sabina lost her Jewish family in Nazi concentration camps.

After WWII, Communist Russia took over Romania and Rev. Richard continued his ministry to the Romanians. But Wrumbrand refused to keep his mouth shut or tow the line. Instead, at a meeting called the "Congress of the Cults," organized by the government, one by one, religious leaders came forward to praise Communism and to swear loyalty to the new regime. Not Richard, however. He refused to swear loyalty to the Communist Party, instead he denounced Communism, "Then I arose and spoke to this congress, praising not the murderers of Christians, but Jesus Christ, stating that our loyalty is due first to Him." Rev. Richard was arrested for this act of disloyalty and sentenced to prison. Between 1945 and 1947, he would distribute 1 million Gospels to Russian troops, often disguising the books as Communist propaganda. He also helped arrange the smuggling of Gospels into Russia.

It was on February 29, 1948 that the secret police kidnapped him as he traveled to church and took him to their headquarters. He was locked in a solitary cell and labeled "Prisoner Number 1." Rev. Richard was imprisoned for 13 years total in Romanian prisons. The first time, he was in prison for 5 years and the second time eight years. Richard underwent crude punishments including being lashed on the back and being refrigerated until half dead and then thawed out (repetitively). Not only did Richard

undergo physical torture, but also brainwashing. According to Richard the brainwashing went like this, "Communism is good! Communism is good! Communism is good! Christianity is stupid! Christianity is stupid! Christianity is stupid! Give up! Give up! Give up!" For 17 hours a day, Rev. Richard went through this brainwashing with his faith intact. He also spent time in isolation. Rev. Richard did not hear a sound, not even the guards outside, walking around. When he was not in isolation, he would preach the Good News to both his torturers and fellow prisoners. Many Communists came to Jesus through his witness. His wife Sabina also suffered much because of her relationship to Rev. Richard. She was informed twice that Rev. Richard was dead by different Communist guards dressed as prisoners. Sabina was also sentenced to years at a labor camp to build a dyke, the Danube Canal project.

In 1959, Rev. Richard was sentenced to prison, this time for 25 years. After 5 years, Rev. Richard was released on a \$10,000 bail from some Christian groups in America.

The Communists told him to go to America but not to preach against them. Richard was reluctant about going to America, not wanting to leave his flock in Romania. The church insisted he go to America though telling him "I should leave the country if the possibility were given, and inform Christians in the West about what is happening." So he went to America and started speaking out on behalf of the Underground Church. Rev. Richard went before the Senate and stripped down to the waist to show them the scars from the atrocities the Communists imposed on him for being a Christian. For this act, Romania contacted him and threatened to kill him. But he did not back down. Rev. Richard started Voice of the Martyrs in order to raise awareness about those who are persecuted around the world.

Rev. Richard died on February 17, 2001 of natural causes. He continued his ministry until his death.

The life of Rev. Richard shows that God can use anyone to do His will. He was dedicated to reaching the Communists with the Good News. The Voice of the Martyrs continues Rev. Richard's work in 52 hostile and restricted nations.

Most of us have studied history and know of what has happened, but of course evil still goes on around us all the time. Recently I had a conversation with someone who was wondering about Nazism, and how it could happen, but also himself; and he pondered what if I had lived in that time, in Germany, or was caught up in the Nazi movement; would I have been able to turn the other way or ignore it? It's a good question to ponder; for as one of my favorite seminary professors put it, put a man in the right situation and he is capable of anything. The 20th century was bar far the bloodiest of them all. But if we look at what happened, and is happening, we should wonder just also why certain things happen in particular places. Europe and North America are largely Christian nations with millions of Christians. Yet in these places, what did we see develop? There arose Nazism, there arose Communism, there arose the Holocaust; there arose persecution and extermination of millions by the likes of Stalin and Hitler. And a couple of weeks back, though it was thankfully overturned by Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's

Health, Roe v. Wade would have been 50 - a fact "mourned" by a number of high profile people, and 60 million have lost their lives through so called reproductive freedom. Yet this has happened and continues to; our state recently passing a bill Bishop Robert Barron rightfully calls "barbarism," celebrated with children present applauding at the signing ceremony. The lines with this as with the other horrors of history are the same; who am I to impose my beliefs, it's none of my business, or I'll just look the other way. That however, is not the way of the Gospel.

As Jesus says, "if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything?" Or if a lamp is put under a bushel basket, what good is that, for it needs to provide light to the house and light must shine before others.

Jesus speaks this week of the salt, the light, the city on the hill. And they all serve the same purpose; namely to point to something greater, to point to God; to point the way to true happiness. Yes, religion and our faith our about our happiness - we just had that last week with the Beatitudes. But Jesus reminds us we have a job to do. In the ancient world before refrigerators the salt kept the meat fresh; before GPS the city on the hill guided people as an object people would look to so they knew where they were going. And to this day, we use light to light things up so we can see them.

The challenge for us as people of faith is to take this seriously. To have our light shine before others to help them find the truth. To not become complacent, but to engage others to help them too find happiness - true happiness - and change this world for the better.

How does one do that?

A starting point is with ourselves. We let the light of God's love into our souls; we shine the light on what needs to be put out in the open. We learn the faith. Pastor Wrumbrand as a young man was curious about churches, but did not want to really go all in on faith as he was focused on other things. But then he meets the carpenter who introduced him to another carpenter in the Gospels. He learns the faith, he immerses himself in it. On our part, we both strive to grow in holiness, but hopefully also strive to learn the faith not just as something we do as kids, but as a way of life. There's so many great ways to do this; there's online websites with great content. One in particular to check out is Formed.org. Our parish subscribes, and here you'll find free videos - literally hundreds of them - and movies and even cartoons for kids. All you is type in "Saint Joseph's Rosemount" enter in your name and email and you're good to go. There's apps like "Hallow" or "Amen," related to Formed.org. There's prayer you can do individually and as a family too. And you combine these things and what you'll find is you'll gradually grow and learn the faith more and more and be better able to articulate it and be that light to others.

With that, how do you shine the light for others in your family? What do our actions say to the people we live with? As Harry Chapin made famous in "Cat's in the Cradle," sometimes a child doesn't learn what is most important because a family gets swamped

by busyness and daily life. But think about what happens when you have a family meal; when you talk to one another and put away the phones. When you know what is going on in the lives of one another. When you apologize for your mistakes, and forgive. When you use tough love and say "no." When you know what is on your kids social media accounts and cell phones. When you listen. When you sacrifice. The greatest gift we give to our loved ones isn't a PS5 or the latest in clothing; it's the gift of ourselves.

And lastly, what are we going to do to change the world? Early in 1965, Edmundite Fr. Maurice Ouellet, pastor of St. Elizabeth's African-American mission in Selma, Alabama, answered a knock at his door. He was surprised to see Martin Luther King standing on the front step.

"The Negro people tell me there is one white man in Selma who is black," King said by way of introduction, "and I want to meet him."

The Nobel Prize-winning civil rights leader was in the midst of his historic voting rights campaign in this cotton-trading town on the banks of the Alabama River. The community was split into hostile black and white camps. White leaders used all means at their disposal to keep African-Americans off the voting rolls. Civil rights forces were equally determined to gain their constitutional rights. Ouellet was the first white Selma resident to openly support justice for African-Americans. He would say Mass, visit the sick, but was challenged by Bernard Lafayette, a 22-year-old organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Lafayette was a veteran of the Nashville, Tenn., lunch counter sit-ins and the Freedom Rides. He put his seminary studies on hold to work full-time in the civil rights movement. His primary objective in Selma was increasing the number of black registered voters. The seminarian and priest began meeting and talking and Fr. Ouellet later said we could spend all our time applying band-aids, but if we didn't get to fundamental rights, we really weren't helping." Saint Elizabeth's became a hub for students working on voter drives, and he told the African-American audience that "they were God's children and American citizens and it was their Christian duty to vote." A newspaper showed a photo of him singing "We Shall Overcome" while holding hands with black woman; the caption read "White Priest dances with Negro woman at Mass meeting." For his actions, he was hauled before a grand jury and accused of being a communist, received menacing phone calls in the middle of the night, and endured repeated threats against his life. After the attacks against the nonviolent demonstrators on March 7, 1965, priests, nuns and laypeople descended on Selma to join in protests. Saint Elizabeth's even ran a shuttle to the protests from the parish. That's what it looks like to engage the world. In life, it's easy to just coast - to get by from day to day. But what is our goal in life? To get the most stuff or the most money? To get the most number of people liking what we say? Or to set about destroying what needs destroying (namely sin and evil) and shining the light on truth? To challenge souls? To help the world see the truth? A question for all of us is how is my faith changing this world around us? Faith is not meant to be private, it's meant to be shared. So invite people to pray with you. Stand up and say "that's not right" when we see immoral actions by a person or someone speaking out for something we know is wrong and immoral. Be willing to be hated by others for the faith.

As one meme online put it best, circling a guy with his hands folded in front of his chest as thousands of others gave a Nazi salute, "be that guy." For I'd much rather stand before God at the judgment and be able to have Him say "these people are here because you didn't give up" then explain "well I didn't ruffle too many feathers, and at the same time I finally got my golf handicap under 10, got over 1,000 friends on Facebook, and was able to get the cabin up north I'd always wanted." Remember our spiritual life isn't just about our benefit, its for the benefit of the world. So let us go out and not be afraid to change it.

A few days ago I talked to a couple of parishioners who went down to the State Capital to peacefully be present in the rotunda with some pro-life signs. One of them commented to me how a teenager was on the other side, who didn't seem to really want to be there. Her mother was apparently screaming and yelling and our parishioner took the time to talk to the young woman, who he said was visibly moved. He then asked me do you think she thought to herself did my mom not want me, is that why she is so supportive of this? Change does not come easy, but what our parishioners were doing was exactly what Pastor Wrumbrand was doing to the Nazis and then the Communists, standing up when other so-called Christians were bowing down before tyranny. We change the world through engaging in it. By being fresh salt; by being the light and the city on a hill. When everyone is politely nodding and going along, or just ignoring the evil people chose in their lives or endorse, hopefully we are not afraid to engage. People might not like the truth when we shine the light on reality, but remember, we do not do it to condemn or shame, but to set free. Because inside the person who is filled with anger and hate, inside that person is a beautiful soul that has just lost it's way because the salt has become ruined. A person who is loved by God, and who just needs to see what that love is about. Hopefully that young woman that our parishioner met will one day, or those kids next to the governor as the so called "PRO" act was sign may think as they age about what they witnessed not just there but in people who stood up for life, just as people did in Selma when Catholics stood up for racism and were hated by many others, including fellow Catholics. It is a dark world out there, yes, but a world that God created, and is a part of, and wants to help so much through you and me. So let us be the light and the city on the hill, and not be afraid to be hated as we strive to change this world for the better and show people what the truth really is.