

## Evangelization Beyond Parades

By the time you read this, Leprechaun Days will be winding down and there will be fireworks later today or they will have already happened yesterday. Since I've been here at Saint Joe's, it's always been fun to walk in the parade each year with folks from the parish and our school as well. I'm so thankful Jordan Ecker has worked so hard to help the larger community get to know more about who we are at Saint Joe's, in particular in getting ready for the community event, and then our Harvest Festival later this year.

Certainly the Leprechaun Days parade is a great way for people to know a little bit more about us at the parish in the larger community. They'll get some information, maybe some candy, see our parishioners and some of our school kids. But of course the parade is just one event during the year. How then do we evangelize to bring folks not just to Saint Joe's, but to the Church? For this is the task of us all through our baptism. To help the seeds that God sows to grow.

I think there's a few things that we can do.

One is to start at home. Evangelizing starts right under our own roofs, and then extends to our extended families. Sometimes this is the hardest; challenging a loved one to go to Mass, or to make better life choices; helping kids to remember how much knowing God and having a relationship with Him matters. Some great tools for this include praying as a family together; coming to our monthly speakers in the fall, winter and spring; and talking about why we believe what we do together as a family.

Second, there is the example of our lives. Like the old song goes, "they'll know we are Christians by our love." Again, this has the biggest impact in the home. If mom and dad aren't going to Mass ever, it's going to be harder for children to see why this is important. But even if a family goes to Mass, as I shared in my homily last weekend with the story of Dr. Kevin Voss, if that faith isn't talked about at home through prayer or lived out, the faith will have a harder time taking root. As I think about how I learned the faith, what I was blessed with in my parents is people who talked about it, but also lived it out through the choices they made to help me learn it, but also see it in action through the sacrifices and actions they did to help the family. Things we say yes to, and things we say no to, are real signs for others.

Third, we can learn the faith. We live in a world where information is quickly accessible, but sometimes we don't take the time to really dig into something to learn the whole story. The faith is more than a sound byte or a few sentences; it's worth learning why the Church teaches as She does with respect to faith and morals. What we'll find is the same thing we learned from our parents; namely the Church wants us to grow, and to become saints, and ultimately be people who are truly free and happy. So look for opportunities to learn more about the faith through spiritual reading, through apologetics websites and videos. You'll be hearing a lot about the Synod in coming months, which will include small groups here at the parish for people to grow in the faith by talking about it with one another.

Fourth, we can talk about the faith with other people when it comes up. Some of the “hot button” issues of the day can come up on social media, or at the dinner table. And people have a lot of misinformation out there. Again, the culture would say “do what you want,” but what we find is this leads us to sadness and misery so often. We need to strive to help people understand the faith, and re-discover what an argument is; namely making points that lead to a conclusion. People might not understand or even be hostile at first, but may start to think more about the faith.

Fifth, we can invite people to Mass and speak to them about why we go to Mass and why we have faith. Mass should bring us peace and joy; not be a chore or just “punching a clock” like I said last week. But sometimes, as Matthew Kelly the Catholic apologist has said, we Catholics speak in “code” and take for granted that others know what we mean when we use terms like “Real Presence” or “Saints” or “Transubstantiation” or “Anointing.” Mass is there to bring us closer to God, so we can start basic and try to meet people where they are at. What is their understanding of the faith? Where are they at on their journey? I think especially with our children, it’s important to explain the faith in particular at Mass; talking about what happens at the ambo, the altar, what those pictures on the wall are (the Stations of the Cross) and gradually bring people along. The faith isn’t just magically learned by coming to Mass. It requires explanation, something we need to do by speaking in a way so others, both the young and those who are non-catechized, can understand.

Sixth, patience, patience. How frustrating it can be when people fall away, or our arguments seem to fall on deaf ears. Don’t give up! Continue to pray, to talk, to set an example. You may be amazed at what happens.

Seventh, are you a joyful person? What does your personality say about your faith? If you look miserable, or are crabby all the time, or negative, it’s not going to be a real selling point for the Catholic faith. We all have lousy days. But think of Mother Teresa; all the suffering she endured and the tough situations she faced day after day. But you always saw her smiling. A woman who suffered, but a woman who had a deep joy because she knew her God. And it brought people to the faith.

Eighth, pray. We pray daily to grow in our relationship with God, so we can also come to know God and reveal Him. And consider praying with, not just for people. A few prayers with someone can do so much.

Lastly, look for ways to get more involved in the parish and for opportunities to bring people to parish events. As noted you’ll be hearing more about the Synod this upcoming winter and small groups for faith formation. But over the course of the year, there are many ministries and our parish is a hub of activity. Whether it’s an annual event like the Harvest Festival or joining the Knights of Columbus or serving as a lector or Eucharistic Minister, there are many ways you can get more involved and invite others to do so too.

Hopefully some of the folks who saw members of the parish in the parade this weekend take a closer look at Saint Joes. But throughout the year, we can do so much to invite people in to help them find a deeper faith life. May we truly be fishers of men.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul