Evangelization as a Way of Life

I have to admit at times I spy on other parishes. Well, sort of.

Typically on Sunday afternoons (1/3 of which are football from noon to 10 p.m.) I'll also visit my parents, and sometimes read the bulletin article of the priest at their parish, Saint Vincent de Paul in Brooklyn Park. I went there too for a number of years, and it's still a thriving faith community. Recently there was a change in pastor as often happens in early July at some parishes. (I just turned "10" here as pastor and have 2 more years on my term and hope to stay beyond that - but that's up to the Holy Spirit and the Archbishop).

In his column, the pastor (formerly the associate pastor), Fr. Mike, signed it "Your Extroverted Shepherd," and talked about his love for parties; those held at the parish, those in his family, as a way to talk to people. Admittedly I can't sign this column "Your Extroverted Pastor" because that ain't me. In fact when we had psychological tests to get into seminary, I tested on the far end of the "introvert" scale. So perhaps I'm a bit like Saint Jerome who would spend his days in a cave, though I can't speak Greek or Latin and translate the Bible. I do spend as much time as possible on road trips or in the woods taking pictures of birds, or in therapy with Emmett who gives me advice and counsel on our walks. And parties aren't really my style. True confession: when invited to parties I usually wait in the car until the last possible minute to go in. A former staff member here said her husband does the same thing, so I know I'm not alone. But I digress.

His column got me to thinking though a bit about evangelization, and Fr. Mike does like to get to know people as any pastor should. I'm not a party guy but try to talk to folks after Mass, walk around at our festival, visit classrooms with Emmett, etc. And notice much of what Jesus does is interaction; His first miracle is at a party, the Wedding at Cana; and he's always with people, in their homes at a meal, or having a conversation trying to bring the person along like the Woman at the Well. The point is extrovert or introvert, we are called to be people of hope, who change this world for the better.

This leads me to what's coming up next weekend, Leprechaun Days. Each year we have a a presence in the parade with a number of students from the school, and some other parishioners as well who ride in the parade. And each year it's an honor to march in the parade and see the smiling faces and people from the area enjoying the day. I'm so glad we have a presence in that parade and are able to publicize Saint Joes.

But if you think about it, so much of our lives it's so important that we do that. I think a problem we have is we can be reluctant to talk about our faith. It's understandable; we as Catholics typically don't go door to door or walk up to people and say "Would you like to be saved?" But being a fisher of souls is something we always want to be on the lookout for. How we do this happens in many ways.

One is compassion and mercy. As I preached on last week with the Good Samaritan,

meeting people where they are at and trying to discern if they are hurting, or need someone to talk to, or a reminder that they are loved can do so much.

But there is also the testament of our lives. Think about the Holy Family. Typically in depictions in art the Holy Family is shown doing the business of a family; Mary working on clothing or doing a chore; Joseph doing carpentry work, Jesus sometimes as a child in between the two. In families so much evangelization happens when we tell one another about Jesus through our conduct; by praying; by bringing the kids to Mass and reminding them God matters a lot more than sports and even school, for He is at the center of our lives; when we forgive; when we help one another.

Broadening that to our larger human family, we not only show one another mercy but we take a chance and talk about our faith in different ways. Perhaps you have a Miraculous Medal or Crucifix you wear, or a Holy Card on your desk. Maybe you invite a neighbor to Mass, or talk to a someone you know who isn't Catholic about the faith. Or when faith and moral issues come up that are often also political "hot button" issues of our day, these too can be opportunities to articulate the faith.

And then there is also the challenging component too of evangelizing through fraternal correction; being open to the guidance of others, but having fortitude to say "I love you but can't support your action." This isn't easy, and sometimes a person can be defensive, especially a friend or family member, but it also just might help them find heaven and true happiness when we are willing to do that.

Marching in a parade isn't hard work. There is no post-parade party (woo hoo!). I can go home and take a cool shower and take it easy for a bit before confessions and Mass. I get to wave and throw out some trinkets. The parade is a great way to let people know Saint Joseph's is here. But what does it mean to be a part of a faith community like ours? What does it mean to really be a Catholic and know who God is? That is the work that goes on long after the street sweeper has cleared and the parade has ended. That is the job we all have as we, like the apostles, are sent. On our part may we strive to daily look for ways to be an entrepreneur of the faith, a fisher of men and women for the Kingdom of God, making sure all know they are invited to the Heavenly Banquet with Jesus who loves us all so deeply.

Have a great Leprechaun Days next weekend. I'll plan to be in the parade, and keep Emmett company during the "sky boomeers" that go off right over the house. May we daily strive to bring people to the Lord; something we do through listening to the Lord like Mary in the Gospel this week, but also doing the work that brings people to God as Martha does too (people sometimes forget both are saints!). What a great gift God's love and mercy are - hopefully we can daily look for ways to let people know what it means to know the God who is love.

God bless from your Introverted Pastor,

Fr. Paul