

By Father Charles Bowes

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20
James 3:16-4:3
Mark 9:30-37

Do you wish to follow Jesus?

Those disciples just didn't get it, did they? ...Those words of Jesus saying, "the Son of man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him and three days after his death the Son of man will rise." They did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They don't quite get the point, or they don't like hearing about suffering, so they ignore Jesus' prediction and begin to argue who is the most important among them.

Now, folks, these disciples were not simply a bunch of dumb bunnies...they serve in St. Mark's gospel as figures, images, foils who do not understand what the readers already believe in – faith. This dramatic misunderstanding of the disciples helps make clear for us and for all who read St. Mark's gospel the meaning and destiny of our own discipleship. And just a few verses later St. Mark's gospel has Jesus show to them a child – one who had no standing in the ancient near East – one who was practically worthless except in the eyes of its parents because so many died so young – St. Mark's gospel is saying that it is through suffering, through service, an identification with those considered worthless, that genuine discipleship becomes manifest.

Hard lesson, right? It was tough in the early Church, and it's tough today for us to hear. We need strength to follow Jesus. We need support to follow Jesus. Our upcoming parish mission provides the strength and the

support to choose to follow Jesus...do you want to do that? Do you?

Our parish mission, which is scheduled to take place the week of October 21 through 26, is intended to be a formation experience which helps everyone develop a stronger spiritual life. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton asks an important question: How can we get to where we're going if we're not on our spiritual path? We need to make a strong connection between our everyday life experience and the person of Jesus Christ. That is what it means to be a disciple. Our parish mission will present a tremendous opportunity for each of us to make that stronger spiritual connection with Jesus from our particular life situation. This is what spirituality is about, and all of us need that connection in our modern world or else we lose our way – without strength, without support.

Furthermore, a big part of following Jesus is to share our faith with others, actually with two kinds of "others" – inactive Catholics and the unchurched. There are approximately eighty million unchurched people in the United States. They may have vague or intense religious convictions, but they have no church connection. Eighteen million of those eighty million are inactive Catholics. No doubt some of that number are made of your family members as well as mine – co-workers, neighbors, friends. Often we have been content to attract people by our personal example, but we usually are pretty tight-lipped when it comes to personal invitation or sharing our faith.

Our Parish Mission challenges us to be a welcoming parish that attracts inactive Catholics back to the Faith

and to invite unchurched people to find an active practice of the Catholic faith. But being the welcoming parish that we are is not enough. We also need skills as to how to reach out and invite people to share our faith. And there are many ways that we can do that. Our parish mission will motivate, energize and instruct us so that we can do this as a regular way of being Catholic.

Consequently, our Parish Mission is, in computer parlance, “user-friendly” – it’s for all ages and states of life. Each evening begins at 7:00 o’clock and ends promptly at 8:15 – with an opportunity for a brief social – but no socializing until late into the evening...folks with young children need to get home – kids need to get to bed – teenagers need their sleep. We shall have a children’s Liturgy of the Word as part of each evening’s activity. Teenagers are welcome to be in their own groups for conversation. Babysitting is available for those under four years of age. During each evening the mission team will preach a homily. We’ll be given time for reflection and faith-sharing, and we will all be invited to participate in a powerful ritual action. On Wednesday, that ritual action is the opportunity for the sacrament of reconciliation. The mission begins with our missionaries preaching at all the Masses the weekend of October 21 and 22 and then each evening that week until Thursday evening – the closing with the celebration of the Eucharist. Each morning at 8:30 a.m. there will be a Eucharist presided over by the missionaries with opportunities for conversation afterwards. Our missionaries will be visiting our day school and our school of religion.

Do you wish to follow Jesus? Please, set aside time to participate. It is a special, a graced opportunity to come closer to Jesus and to find that strength and support not only for ourselves but for all those with whom we come in contact and with whom we form the Body of Christ, which we become at every Eucharist at least in a beginning way.

There is a story told about a great teacher who had many disciples. At the end of their instruction, before they went out into the world as masters in their own

right, he taught them the mantra of life and death. Phrase by phrase he taught them, until they had learned it by heart.

The master told them that as long as they said this mantra faithfully they would be blessed – they would have insight and clarity; it would keep them from despair. But he warned them not to teach anyone else the mantra; it was only for them, the enlightened.

One day a disciple asked why he could not share the mantra with others. “If you do,” replied the Master, “you will live in darkness even when the light is all around you. You will know only despair and misery. You will be damned forever.” Nonetheless, the disciple, wanting to share enlightenment with his people, taught them the mantra, phrase by phrase.

When the master heard this, he said, “I must follow him. Out of all my disciples he alone has learned wisdom and compassion. He is now my master.”

Folks, you’ll find on the ends of your pews a little card which is a prayer for inactive Catholics. I would be grateful if you would distribute it at this time so everyone has a copy. I invite you to participate now in a very simple action to help inactive Catholics to find their way back to an active practice of the faith. Please think about someone you know who is an inactive Catholic. Commit yourself to pray for that person frequently during the next few weeks prior to and including the mission. You can use the prayer that’s written on the card. Write down the name or just the first name, initials, son, daughter, friend – whatever – of the inactive Catholic – the names will be kept in confidence in a basket before the altar. Detach the appropriate portion, fold it and place the detached portion in the baskets I’ll ask the ushers to pass. Or drop the folded portion in the designated location at the doors of the church. The entire parish will pray for the people whose names are on the cards. If possible, bring this person with you to the mission. So let us pray this prayer together.

Do you wish to follow Jesus?