

Homily for April 7, 2002
Second Sunday of Easter

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 2:42-47
1 Peter 1:3-9
John 20:19-31

The Lord sends us as well.

“As the Father has sent me, so I send you,” says Jesus in John chapter 20. And we’re apt to say, “Whoa, wait a minute, I just got here and already you’re sending me out to preach?” After all, we did just get here, didn’t we?

We did just arrive at the table fresh from Lent, the penance and the renewal of Baptismal promises. And some of us just got to the table through the burial and birth of baptism last weekend. Literally, they entered the font from the east and stepped out toward the table, toward the altar, toward the west. Isn’t this a little soon to be sending us out?

Well, the point of coming to the table in the first place is to become what we receive here. In other words, the table arrival isn’t the end of the story, it’s but the beginning. Coming to the table isn’t a thing separate and distinct from everything else, a nice thing if you can do it, but is the source and summit from which everything else flows. What we do here each week is become what we receive – the Body and Blood of the Glorified Lord – and then we share that all week with the world we touch. And we come back next week to be fed again at the Lord’s table of Word and Bread, and the cycle begins all over again, week after week, year after year though all the cycles of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter and Ordinary Time. That’s what we Catholics do. And this time after Easter is the time to remind all of us old-timers about that, and to instruct the new Catholics, the neophytes, in our Catholic worship practice.

And, wouldn’t you know it, the words spoken to those first disciples in the upper room are being spoken to us today by our Archbishop: “I send you,” he’s saying to all the parishes of the Archdiocese, to participate in the Billy Graham Mission to take place this coming June 27 – 30 in downtown Cincinnati. And, you know what, I think he’s right. We should participate – and there are many ways to do that.

Now, if you had told me a few years back that I, a Catholic priest, would be standing in front of my

congregation encouraging my parishioners to be part of an evangelizing effort led by a fundamentalist preacher, I would have told you that was nonsense. “While God can work through anyone,” I’d have said, “that sort of thing is just not our style. We Catholics don’t do that kind of evangelizing,” I’d say. “We welcome people to come to us; we don’t go to them,” I’d say.

Well, we do now – we do go out to others, reach out – ever since the Pope and the Bishops called us back to our roots of what it means to be Christian – to share the faith actively, at home, in the workplace, and in unique events like the Billy Graham Mission.

And our parish is uniquely situated to be part of this because of the evangelizing efforts we make every year to visit neighborhoods door to door. This summer event will be our outreach for this year – all the components of prayer and preparation, support and invitation will be there, but this time, people – Catholics – will be *coming to us* – coming home to us and to all the parishes who participate. And the Archbishop is asking that we be ready to welcome them, to companion them.

It is estimated that at the Mission there will be between 3,000 and 8,000 Catholics, many of them marginal Catholics, who will experience the Lord as Thomas did and exclaim in their heart, “My Lord and my God.” They will come down to the altar where folks like you and I need to be, as “counselors,” – to be there for them.

Folks, I think this is a golden opportunity to evangelize Catholics and to help our parish and the Church and the city of Cincinnati so much in need of healing. To say a word further of how we might participate, I welcome Mr. Jack Maisel, a long-time parishioner.

Jack Maisel

As Fr. Charlie said, the Billy Graham Mission will be at Paul Brown Stadium the last weekend in June. There will

also be a special session for children on Saturday morning, and one for teens and young adults on Saturday evening, with special music and entertainment that appeals to each generation. Attendance is free.

As you may know, since Vatican II, our Popes and Bishops have been encouraging Catholics to participate in ecumenical prayer services and to pray and work for unity among Christian faiths. This is an ideal opportunity for us to promote unity, as well as to gather back Catholic friends who no longer practice their faith.

About 200,000 people will attend the Mission, and about 50,000 of those will have Catholic roots. Somewhere between 3,000 and 8,000 of the people who come forward to recommit their life to Christ will be Catholic – either participating Catholics or fallen away Catholics.

The beautiful thing about the Billy Graham Mission is that those people who make the altar call are referred back to their churches for follow-up ministry directly after the Mission. We will need people from OLR who are trained to be counselors, who will meet and talk with persons who come forward at the Mission. We will also need people who would help with the follow-up Bible Studies and fellowship groups back at OLR. The Billy Graham Mission provides training for this – it is called the Christian Life and Witness Course. These classes begin in the middle of April at a variety of times, dates, and places all around town (look at the paper in your pews). 50% of the people who go to these classes don't even go with the intention of becoming a counselor or a follow-up person. They just go to check it out without making a commitment. It's a really good course for showing you how to introduce other people to Jesus. You can attend any night, any location – just go one time each week. Anyone who's 13 years and older can attend. You don't have to register ahead, just show up. I think you'll like it!

Get this – 80% of the people who go to a Billy Graham Mission have been personally invited by somebody else. I'm sure every single one of you knows someone who may be personally touched by Billy Graham's message. We all have family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers who no longer go to church, or are struggling in some way.

They may not be open to coming back to Mass with you, but they may be willing to go with you to hear Billy Graham. Billy Graham will issue them the invitation to recommit their lives to Jesus and to come back to their churches – churches where Christian brothers and sisters

will be ready to walk with them in the follow-up Bible study. We at OLR want to be ready to embrace our Catholic brothers and sisters who may be returning to the Faith. This is why we are encouraging as many people as possible to attend the Christian Life and Witness course.

Now let's look at the Friend-to-Friend card in your pews. This is something everyone can do! There is even a specially designed Friend-to-Friend card for children to use and a special card for teens and young adults. (They can pick these up at the doors when they leave.)

Inside, there are spaces to write peoples' names down. Begin thinking about the people in your life you would like to see in the pews around you. It's up to you. It may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for somebody you know. Through your invitation, you may be helping someone who needs assistance. Take the card home with you. When you get home, start writing down the names of those people you know who might benefit by going to the Mission. You won't have to hand that card in to anyone. It's just a tool for you to start listing the names of people you will pray for and maybe invite.

It all begins with prayer. Pray daily for the persons you include on the card. Ask the Lord to open up the opportunity for you to invite them to go with you to the Billy Graham Mission. Pray that the Mission will be successful in healing our city and that our parish will be actively involved, and bring many people home.

In the weeks to come, we'll be telling you more. There are many other ways to get involved in the Billy Graham Mission, like becoming a choir member, an usher, a volunteer, or doing community service. Ask God what he wants you to be doing to help with the Mission.

For now, I'd like to strongly encourage you to attend the Christian Life and Witness course, because it **begins next week!** We know that there are some folks from OLR planning to attend on Monday evenings, Tuesday evenings and Thursday evenings. Please come to the family room at the end of mass if you'd be interested in car-pooling.

If you have any questions at all about the Billy Graham Mission, I and others from our Parish will be in the family room in the back of church ready to help you. There's also a brief, six-minute video that shows more about the Christian Life and Witness course.

***As Jesus said in our gospel today:
"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."***