

The Name is *Together Sharing Christ*. So how about it folks?

Easter Vigil presenters – You can still submit your text.

Have you attended a retreat, a lecture – how about sharing an idea that really struck you? (3 sentence paragraphs gladly accepted)

Did you take a course this semester at ELI (or some time in past)? How about sharing a paper you wrote? Think it's too academic? Your friendly neighborhood editor would be happy to choose some sections / cut / etc. Just send it to her.

9:30 Theme Presenters – Have trouble cutting to the 120 word limit? How about submitting here your expanded version, "Reflections on the readings for the 2nd Sunday in Time"?

Anybody out there reading a book? Religious or not. How about a pithy quote? Here, I'll give you an example:

*There is no good nor evil.
There is only power—and
those too weak to use it.*

*J.K. Rowling
Harry Potter
and the Sorcerer's Stone*

(Is this inevitable when power in church, government, or private life is unchecked?)

Or how about suggesting it to be reviewed in these pages?

Have you read a really good article lately? We can send for copyright permission to reprint all or part.

Do you just have a question or a topic you'd like to see dealt with?

Letter from the Pastor

May 27, 2011

Shalom!

As our Easter season draws to a close, the readings point us in the direction of Pentecost, the great feast that concludes our Easter celebrations.

There are a lot of dimensions to the feast of Pentecost, and I think some balancing of those dimensions is necessary to draw out the full meaning of the Feast.

1. In the pre-Vatican-II liturgy, Pentecost was the most important feast in the liturgical calendar, marginally outranking even Easter itself. It was celebrated as the Birthday of the Church, the day when the sacred institution of the Church, as designed by Jesus himself, was formally commissioned by the Holy Spirit, with the Pope (Peter) at its head, surrounded by the Cardinals (James and John) and the bishops (the other 8 remaining apostles). The remaining Sundays of the Church Year were then counted as the “So-many-th Sunday after Pentecost.” It was the Institutional Church celebrating itself.

Vatican II played all this down more than a little. It directed a new liturgical calendar, with the Triduum at its heart and apex, and transformed Pentecost into its present function as the concluding feast of the Easter Season, after which we start again counting Sundays of Ordinary Time. This was a much more balanced approach, with a lot less institutional focus and a lot more focus on what God is doing for us in Jesus Christ.

In this country, and especially in parishes like this one, however, we may have a tendency to carry this a little too far, and unbalance things in the opposite direction. We have a healthy skepticism of institutions in general, and religious institutions in particular, and this is good. But we also need to remember that every community needs to institutionalize itself at least to some degree in order to survive. If all your family is a well-run business, you have a sorry excuse for a family. But if your family is not a business well-run enough to let every member have a clear idea of their responsibilities, so that chores get done and bills get paid, you won't be a family very long. Same for the Church, whether at the parish, diocesan or world levels. We should maintain our skepticism, but also let our knowledge of the necessity of an institutional dimension teach us some patience with institutional foibles.

2. A second dimension of Pentecost has come to the fore in recent years, a concentration on the coming of the Holy Spirit and on the Spirit's gifts. This has been most emphasized in the charismatic movement, where the ability to speak in tongues has been highly prized as evidence of the Spirit's presence, and exulting in the Spirit has become the heart of devotional life. Even those of us who are not Charismatic, with a capital C, have become more aware of our charisms, our individual gifts of the Spirit, and

this awareness has been encouraged by Vatican II, which spoke often of the charisms, not just of saints or of religious orders, but of ordinary, individual Christians, who have gifts given by the Holy Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation, and who have a right to have those charisms respected by the Christian community. We all need to feel the Spirit stirring within us, and to revel in the Spirit's gifts.

But this dimension too can be carried too far, leading to a sort of spiritual rugged individualism. I rejoice in my relationship with God in the Spirit, and I recognize the gifts God has given me, and this personal relationship becomes the center of my life. If I find a few like-Spirited individuals to commune with, so much the better, but basically I'm in my own little world. Me and God. This runs the risk of losing the community dimension of our faith, or a least weakening the realization that all the baptized are with me in this community, even those whose spiritualities are very different from my own.

3. A third dimension of Pentecost is implicit in the new structure of the liturgical year: just as the feast of the Baptism, the concluding feast of the Christmas season, celebrates the coming of the Spirit on Jesus and the beginning of his mission, so Pentecost, the concluding feast of the Easter season, celebrates the coming of the Spirit on us and the beginning of our mission. This provides a outward and forward focus to the feast: it is not just about the institution, and not just about my receiving the Spirit, but also about God sending us (me and the rest of the baptized community) out into the world to continue the mission of God's creative love. If Jesus was anointed by the Spirit as Prophet, Priest, and King, and if we are all anointed by the same Spirit, then we are both empowered and directed to share in his work of Word, Sacrament and Service.

To focus on this dimension of the feast alone would also be unbalanced. We can concentrate so much on what we **do** that we forget to be who we are, and we can concentrate so much on what **we** do that we forget that we are a part of a much larger community, and even part of an institution.

But if we keep all three of these dimensions in mind, even if we choose to emphasize one or another more than the others in our own lives, we can appreciate the Feast in more of its fullness.

Peace and love,

Pastor

In Plain English

Anne Maura English

Earlier this month I participated in the St. V's annual Family Retreat, which had as its theme this year, ourselves as the Body of Christ. One outcome of that for me was a return to some reflection on our use of language. The first place this took me to was my—and our—use of the word “church.”

How often do I talk about “the Church’s position on . . .” or about something “the Church” is doing, has done, or used to do. Of course, I know better. Vatican II, which I claim to be a passionate supporter of, defined *the Church* as “the people of God.” Yet how often do I use the word “Church” to mean “the Vatican” or “the [conservative elements in] hierarchy.”

Now to those who still claim that taking issue with word use is irrelevant, if not downright silly, this is a non-issue. But, again, I know better. Sociologically, psychologically, even theologically, language we use and the words we say make a difference. To use the term “church” when what I mean is “the Vatican” or “the conservative elements in the hierarchy” reinforces the idea that the latter ARE the church. It reinforces that idea in my own mind and in the mind of anyone who hears me speak or reads what I’ve written.

So one of my post-retreat reflections is to clean up my language act and to use the word “Church” only when I can honestly use it in the phrase, “the Church, the People of God” and to specify other groups when that’s whom I’m really talking about. And I’m inviting you to call me on that—if you hear me saying “church” when you know very well I mean something else, speak up and draw it to my attention.

The second language issue I got to thinking about was how we speak of the pope. There’s the term “Holy Father.” Now if you really believe that this man is “holy” in a way that no one else is among the People of God, it seems to me you’re entitled to use that term as you will. What puzzles me is the number of people who continue to use that term even when they’re criticizing or even railing against the one who holds it. Even when it’s evident that they don’t think he’s some kind of religious superman. What’s that all about? Do we really want to reinforce that idea? If we don’t, certainly the term “the pope” identifies the person one is speaking about without dousing it in incense. (For those who’d like to step even closer to the Third Millennium, there’s the term I learned from one of my Catholic U professors: “the bishop of Rome.” Very *traditional* AND very Vatican II—although I’ll warn you, you usually have to say “the bishop of Rome, the pope” or your listeners won’t understand who you’re talking about, which, of course, makes it doubly educational!)

Pentecost and Our Confirmation

In the last issue, one of our reflections on Easter was the feast as a time to renew our baptismal commitment. This time we're going to look at Pentecost—as a time of the Spirit and as a time to renew our Confirmation.

Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are the three sacraments designated as sacraments of *initiation*. They're the ones by which we become fully Christian. All three are rooted in the experience of the early disciples—none of whom, incidentally, were ever baptized or confirmed sacramentally. They didn't need to be. Our celebration of those sacraments is our making present of the reality those disciples experienced.

In Baptism, we replicate the experience of the early disciples in coming to know Jesus and the God he revealed and in coming to know themselves. In the sacrament we acknowledge the gift that the disciples came to acknowledge over time: that we are truly God's own beloved children, offered God's own "life and life in abundance," called to share Jesus' kinship with the Father and with one another. We are invited to accept the reality of that and what it can mean for our lives from Jesus by accepting Jesus and Jesus' presentation of Who God is and who we are.

Baptism, in a way, provides in ritual sacrament the initial experience of the disciples' being gifted by Jesus and making an initial acceptance of Jesus. But our situation is radically different than theirs. We live in the time after the historical Jesus. Our experience of Jesus and of his message must come to us through each other, the Body of Christ. That, of course, was an experience which the disciples also had to enter into—along with a period of reflection and ongoing growth in understanding the full meaning of Jesus' presence and teaching. And so in Baptism we celebrate already the giving of the Holy Spirit, the One promised by Jesus to teach and guide: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you. . . ." [Jn 16:12-13] "The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you." [Jn 14:26]

Confirmation moves us into the second "moment," as it were, in the lives of the disciples. Ultimately accepting Jesus, accepting oneself as beloved of God, is only the first step. Advocate though I am of inclusive language, I think we lose something when we unreflectively change "sons of God" to "daughters and sons of God." The second phrase certainly captures the intimacy of that love relationship that God offers to us. But it loses some of the cultural significance of "son." In New Testament times—and in reality until very recently in our own times—the "son and heir" had a different relationship to their Father than did the other children in the family. The "son and heir" had an awesome responsibility. He had to continue the family name and legacy and he was responsible for managing whatever wealth the Father had to pass on. "Some day," the cliché went, "all this will be yours." In Christianity that "day" is now. With Christ with us "until the end of time" and the Spirit poured out to enliven us, the building up of the Body of Christ has been turned over to us.

In that sense, we the baptized—whatever our gender—are truly "sons of God, and if sons then heirs also." The disciples understood that. They were people with a mission. For some that meant going out to preach the gospel to the world. For most it meant staying put but living that gospel in such a way that they were witnesses to the gospel AND continuing to live in a vibrant and growing personal relationship with Jesus, with the Father, and with the Spirit.

We're all aware that there have been people who've been persecuted—tortured—put to death for their faith in Jesus. Perhaps we've asked ourselves if our faith would stand that test. But sometimes living the faith is just as challenging. In 1549 the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in Japan and began preaching the gospel. Eventually Christian missionaries were expelled, Christians were martyred, and by 1632 Christianity had been outlawed. When Catholic priests were again permitted back into Japan—220 years later in 1853—they were astounded to find that there was a thriving underground Catholic Christian church in Japan. Lay people had kept alive faith in Jesus and his message for a little over 200 years—against the “law” and against all odds. How would I fare, I ask myself? If some natural or biologic disaster wiped out most of what I mean by “church,” could I get it going again—keep it alive?

Our contribution to the faith may be far less dramatic but no less important. I was fortunate in the 1950's to be taught by SSND sisters who had a vibrant sense of what it meant to be part of the Body of Christ. Years before I ever heard of “the butterfly effect” in science, I had been taught that being what was then called “in the state of grace” was a gift to the entire Body of Christ and affected all other believers. Many years later I read an image from Karl Rahner which portrayed this another way. He compared creation to a huge building. Each one of us is a window in that building. The quality of our faith and prayer life is the opening of that window which lets God's love and power into the world. What that means is that *every* moment of my life makes a contribution to the healing and ongoing creation of the world. Even if I'm snowed under, working three part-time jobs at fast food joints, not a “good work” in sight, much less time to serve on a parish committee, the quality of my spiritual life, nourished by my prayer life and participation in the Eucharist, may be the crucial factor in the world's movement at this moment toward the coming of the kingdom.

So Pentecost can be an exciting time—and a challenging one. Time to own and acknowledge the work of the Spirit in my life. Time to re-commit myself to being “light” and “salt for the world.”

Reflections:

More questions than you can probably use, but if one resonates with you, listen for the voice of the Spirit in it for you.

1. Hot, steamy, summer Baltimore is a great place to reflect on the image of wind that we hear about in the Pentecost reading from Acts. Imagine your relief on a muggy day when a fresh breeze promises a storm to clear the air and cool the day. Or you step outside after a storm and savor the cooling breeze. Or you roll down the windows as you near Ocean City and feel the wind off the Atlantic. But that refreshing wind can also power mighty turbines. *What has been my experience in the last year of a cooling breeze or a brisk wind that has refreshed and renewed me? Can I name that now as the Holy Spirit—the Spirit Who cares as much for my day to day life as my prayer moments? Is the breath of the Spirit even now tugging at the corners of my spirit?*

2. Fire is the other powerful image of the coming of the Spirit in Acts. *What has been my experience in the last year of being “on fire”? Can I name that now as the Holy Spirit? Where do I need that enthusiasm, that treasuring of life? What sparks has the Spirit set going in the depths of my self and have I asked the Spirit's help in fanning those flames?*

3. *What is the quality of my personal commitment to God or Jesus? What is the quality of my prayer life and my “doing” of the Eucharist? How is the Church—the Christian community richer because of these? How has the Spirit enriched them in the last year? What is the Spirit inviting me to between now and next Pentecost?*
4. *How have I grown in understanding “all I have to say to you”? How has the Spirit in the last year deepened my understanding and savoring of the gospel and the truths of my faith? How is the Church—the Christian community richer because of this? What is the Spirit inviting me to between now and next Pentecost?*
5. *A wry comment on witness: “If you were arrested tomorrow on charge of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” What is the evidence in my work life, my social life and casual interactions with others, in all the places where I spend time when I’m not inside the walls of a church or religion-owned building? How has the Spirit enriched them in the last year? What is the Spirit inviting me to between now and next Pentecost?*
6. *What responsibility do I take as “son and heir”? What do I do to make St. Vincent’s a place about which people can say, “See how they love one another”? What do I do to take responsibility for the life and work of the parish? How has the Spirit enriched this aspect of my life in the last year? What is the Spirit inviting me to between now and next Pentecost?*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful and enkindle in use the fire of Your love.

Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created.

And You will renew the face of the earth.

Give us this day our daily bread.

The word in Greek that we translate as “daily” is a strange one and the translation is uncertain. “Daily” echoes what it means. But so does “of the future.”

Give us this day our bread of the future.

Give us this day the basic piece of nourishment which will impel us into the future.

St. V Family Retreat 2011

Questions from the Adult Sessions

Session #1

What particularly attracts me to the teaching of the Body of Christ in Paul?

What particularly is a challenge for me vis-à-vis the Body of Christ in Paul?
(Keep in mind throughout these questions that “challenge” can be a negative word—a confrontation with some way I fall short OR it can be a positive thing—something that excites me with a new possibility.)

Session #2

What are the God-given gifts that I claim?

What are the gifts that others have told me that I have but that I don't fully accept?

What gifts would I like to have—but don't?

How does St. Vincent de Paul Parish need my giftedness *now*?

Session #3

How is the community of St. Vincent de Paul an enriching one to me?

How is it challenging to me?

At this time in my life, do I need more enriching or more challenging in my life as a Christian? Why? What do I need *now*?

Why do I stay at St. Vincent's?

What changes would I like to see at St. Vincent's, if any?

Session #4

What contributions does St. Vincent de Paul make to the archdiocese and to the larger Church?

In what ways does the parish of St. Vincent's need to be challenged by the larger church? In what ways, affirmed?

Here are some of the group responses of those on retreat. Please note that while there is some repetition, in actuality there was more. A number of reporters to the large group said, “We said a lot of the same things” and did not repeat. These notes were collected from the oral reports given.

Be aware that approx. 60 adults participated in the retreat, but all were from the 9:30 Mass community.

Group Answers (6 groups) to last question for Session #2

**WHICH GIFTS OF MINE DOES ST. VINCENT’S NEED NOW
(and am I willing to commit to using them?)**

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Family involved service, especially with homeless Practical skills</p> <p>Evangelization More knowledge in regards to Catholic Social Teaching Change in education programs</p> <p>Spirit of discernment Evangelization in neighborhood Diversity in ethnic groups Calm people</p> <p>Spirit of discernment Spirit of enthusiasm Stability More youth ministry</p> | <p>Encourage others More sign language training More children’s liturgy of the word ministries</p> <p>Liturgy planners Enthusiasm Peace makers Knitting ministry Recycling</p> <p>Encourage new leadership Encourage more involvement, especially by youth</p> <p>More energy More evangelization More friendliness</p> |
|---|---|

Group Answers to Questions for Session #3 (Four groups for this session)

ENRICHING FACTORS

CHALLENGING FACTORS

WHY STAY?

Connectedness , like extended family
 Friendships
 Liturgies
 Homilies
 Service opportunities
 "Alive"

Homogeneity of ethnic make-up
 Distance (from home to church)
 Too much committee work
 Lack of youth participation
 Too much "doom and gloom" about
 Dick's departure

Community
 Friendships
 Freedom of Roman
 Catholic thought
 Like a family

A constant
 Music
 Adult formation and community
 Homilies
 Commitment to peace and justice
 Esp. need to change things
 systematically
 Women in ministry
 Tridium
 Supportive spirituality
 Liturgies, music, homilies
 Friendly
 Non-judgmental
 Social justice
 Open to new ideas

Adult formation and community -
 hard to maintain at times
 Unable to use talents
 Homogeneity of ethnic make-up
 Feel "outdone" educationally
 Mixing of ideologies
 Do new folks feel accepted and
 challenged

Family-like
 Home

Distance (from home to church)
 Changing times in which we live
 Call to justice
 Homogeneity of ethnic groups
 Youth specific activities

Welcoming
 Community
 Friendships

Sharing with each other
 Young adult group
 Friendly
 Homilies
 Openness
 Community feel
 Welcoming
 Encourages spiritual growth

Upcoming changes
 Distance (from home to church)
 Meaningful service
 Need more and more energy
 to sustain ministries
 Challenging homilies

Friendship
 Community
 Spiritually enriching

NEED ENRICHMENT OR CHALLENGE?

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|
| 3/4 E | 100% E | 8/12 E | 3 E |
| 1/4 C | 60% C | 3/12 C | 3 C |
| | | 1/12 Both | 3 didn't say |

Questions for Session #3, continued.

WHAT CHANGES WOULD I LIKE TO SEE, IF ANY?

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>More women leaders Change mass times More youth in ministry Increased recruitment of neighborhood Inclusion of more gay-lesbian individuals</p> <p>Burn red books – music more traditional than would like More cooperation among committees More spiritual atmosphere in meetings Better communication with regards to PLA, PLD</p> <p>New ideas for children and youth ministry Mentors for new ministers needed Need more emphasis on Sacrament of Reconciliation</p> | <p>Recruit more young adults Announce song numbers at Mass More racial/gender inclusivity Change Mass times Increase number of small groups More and better communication parish-wide Better communication about scheduling issues</p> <p>More multicultural focus More electronic communication, like SKYPE More education programs More choir members More member involvement, especially on Parish Council Shorter Mass time by 15 minutes (now 1-1/4 to 1-1/2) Get hymn board Make church more visitor friendly Sit in different places</p> |
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Questions for Session #4 (4 groups)

WHAT CONTRIBUTIONS DOES ST. V MAKE TO ARCHDIOCESE AND LARGER CHURCH

- Welcoming and supportive for traditional and non-traditional Catholics
- Strong support for neighborhood Catholic education
- Supportive of a variety of cultures
- Speaker series in the church – Brings in people from different churches
- Support of poor, marginalized and homeless
- Also analysis of social structures – leader in Peace and Justice
- Supportive of Maryland Catholic Conference (i.e. like letter about immigrant education we just received)
- When we speak up, we set an example for others to speak out
- Model of lay involvement (and it works!) Might encourage more churches to do that
- Seek to follow Christ’s teaching without following rules for rules sake
- Crucial that some parishes keep a spark of Vatican II alive, need to keep that alive in greater church
- Believe our personal holiness affects everything else in the world - to the extent that we are spiritually enriching people, we can offer that to the world

- Model for problem solving by consensus, e.g. Park
- Ability to express opinions/be involved
- Laity contributing to liturgies: richness
- Breathing room/ buffer to those who are
- “Work as yeast” to keep going with rest of the church
- Involvement in social justice work
- Park: homeless visible to city
- Fr. Lawrence balances Liturgy of Word and Teaching of the Word
- Homeless park ministry
- Alternative to rest of Church and Archdiocese
- Divergent, yet still Catholic
- Think critically
- Social Services (AA, clothing, food) Outreach to needy
- Midnight Mass, tolerance
- Traditional liberal values
- Gay-friendly
- Commuter parish
- High adoption rate in parish
- Women’s Ministry, female participation in Ministry
- Radicals
- Encouragement to other struggling parishes
- Refuge for disaffected, last resort Rwanda contribution
- St. James and John School
- Sister parish in Nicaragua
- Neighborhood participation (Jonestown)
- Representative to Archdiocese, “outpost” actions that can’t be ignored
- ASL Mass
- Lay homilists
- Balanced ideology
- Critique of church by Fr. Lawrence
- Church that explores theology
- Inviting to non-Catholics, to ex-priests and seminarians, welcoming to gays
- Role of women in the church
- Champions of peace and social justice (have been involved since Vietnam)
- Supportive of urban churches, urban commission,
- Lay participation in parish council
- Featured in national press for emphasis on Word, Altar Bible, and as a center for political action

IN WHAT WAYS DOES ST. V’S NEED TO BE CHALLENGED?

- Need to appreciate that we’re not the last bastion of hope in the Catholic Church, be open to other good things
- Work on language - church is not the hierarchy: we are the church – Let our language reflect our belief
- Look at more outreach to the people around St. Vincent’s. People in the neighborhood
- Using more language of inclusivity in our liturgies: “Lord” is not inclusive
- Inspire youth (kids) to participate – Maybe find ways to keep college kids involved WHILE they are in college (care packages) Ask college kids!
- Not sure about melting pot, but we may NEED bi-lingual services for major events but otherwise may need distinctly cultural services—rather than a mixture that satisfies no one
- Need to keep studying Vatican II; Need to try to own and understand what happened there.

- Diversity
 - Need to be more family friendly – more nurturing towards families
 - Not living in past/complacency
 - To let go of the idea that we are especially unique – continuing from past
 - Find new ways to express our ways of doing things differently in positive light and to express values we follow
 - Utilize technology for distance issues and other attempts
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- Move beyond complacency
 - Upcoming changes in leadership
 - Archdiocesan plan for St. V's
 - Attracting young families
 - Treating each other as Christ would
 - Publicizing what we do, e.g. Taize, ASL Mass, etc.
-
- Recruit more parishioners
 - Offer invitation to committees (some new people thought people were elected to them)
 - Begin trying new ideas
 - Be more inviting (embrace ideas of young people)
 - More connectedness to neighborhood
 - Connect more with St. James and John (financially, fundraising events)
-
- Conservative trend
 - Engagement with geographic area, neighborhood
 - Humility
 - Reconciliation
 - Forget about time and length of mass
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- Need true community space (updated kitchen to host dinners, etc.)
 - Welcome other liturgical styles
 - Welcome other mass communities to greater participation in parish activities
 - Do more PR – Facebook, realtors (for neighborhood info) welcome packet to new people
 - Look to other good practices

IN WHAT WAYS DOES ST. V'S NEED TO BE AFFIRMED ?

- Some non-parishioners have made a point of contacting St. V: they feel good being a Catholic seeing homeless in our park
- Support of St. James & John is very good
- Support of Peace and Justice
- Involvement in Beyond the boundaries and BRIDGE
- Enthusiasm, welcoming nature and inclusivity
- Find a way to celebrate this stuff, rather than always thinking about what needs to be done. Self-affirmation. Maybe stats for what we've done
- Fun and Affirming Celebration on St. Vincent de Paul day maybe? Could also be a way of attracting people
- Volunteer appreciation day/Parishioners appreciation day
- Broader commissioning than just the rel. ed teachers

- Homeless
- Social Justice
- Affirmed by individuals saying – Yes, you are welcoming and keep coming back
- To continue to be recognized as a parish without Fr. Dick

Archdiocese likes PLD plan (?)

- Plan with assistant for 2 years
- Place of refuge for disaffected
- Emergency Services
- Park ministry
- Justice and Peace activity
- Lay ministries
- “Prayers answered” bulletin board in church – also suggestion box
- Intellectual preaching
- Allowed to be yourself, e.g. children dancing, alleluia gestures, some people kneeling
- Music, changing, dancing, open to choices
- Fr. Dick’s reliability and stamina
- Liturgy planning
- Patron of the Arts, (Joe’s compositions, church banners, Illustrated Altar Bible, Sculpture)
- The role of women in our parish church
- Limay connection
- Youth education, summer Bible school
- For peace and justice work
- Liturgies
- Number of people with graduate education in theology and level of intellectual homilies
- Our music program
- Welcoming church
- We offer to much people need to know about
 - sign language interpretation at 9:30 Mass
 - diversity of music
 - special Mass times (e.g. 12:15 A.M.)
 - programs for young children at mass

Worth Revisiting: a second look at some quotes from books we’ve used for retreat and adult ed in the past.

From *Quest for the Living God*. Elizabeth Johnson. 2009. Used for a Speakers Series 2009 and 2010

People who belong to a religion are initiated into a particular living tradition of encounter with the Holy. Countless ancestors over the centuries, having experienced this awesome and attractive mystery in their own lives, translated their experience into particular texts, rituals, and practices that captured what they felt and knew to be true. By engaging in the life of the community, believers discover the sense of the Holy handed on by their forbears. In turn, their own seeking and finding, and “practicing” this earthshaking and fascinating mystery in the stresses of their own era keep the process going for generations still to come.

Taken as a whole, the changing phenomenon of the world’s religions displays the character of an enormous quest, an ongoing search for what is ultimate and whole.

Presentations from the Easter Vigil

3rd Hour

Deuteronomy - Death of Moses

Jim Casey

The death of Moses marks the end of Israel's forty years of wandering in the desert. The end of Exodus and the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy describe Israel during the period between the flight into the desert and the death of Moses.

Part of the narrative is Israel's recurring unfaithfulness. At one point, God decrees that, except for Joshua and Caleb, all of the generation that left Egypt will die before reaching the Promised Land.

In the reading we just heard, God tells Moses he would not make it into Canaan because Moses and Aaron broke faith with God at Maribeth-Kadesh in the desert of Zin. That incident is described in Numbers. The people were rebelling because they lacked water. God told Moses to strike a rock with his staff and water would flow from it. Moses struck the rock twice and water flowed from it. God then told Moses and Aaron that because they were not faithful to God, they would not reach the Promised Land. Apparently Moses doubted God. He hesitated as if he wasn't sure that striking the rock would produce water.

In Exodus, the same incident is described without any hint that Moses was unfaithful. The descriptions of the incident come from two different traditions. Apparently one tradition felt a need to explain why Moses failed to reach Canaan. The other tradition felt no such need.

Today, the punishment of Moses seems disproportionate to his offense. The people of Israel living when these passages were written had a different world view. Israel had sinned in ways that deserved the annihilation of the whole people. Israel survived only through the mercy of God. God had every right to wipe out the nation, so anything less was both just and merciful.

The threat to exterminate an entire people was very real. God put a ban on all the people occupying Canaan when Israel arrived. As a result,

thirty three nations were destroyed. Every man, woman and child was killed. Every domestic animal was slaughtered.

We are scandalized reading about that today. Why would God condone, even participate in, genocide? We may be scandalized, but we have no right to feel morally superior. We poison the planet. We run up debts to be paid by future generations. We have weapons capable of destroying humanity.

This morning, however, I don't want to address the big questions. I want to get personal. With all they did, why didn't Moses and Dr. King receive their rewards? I mean if I work hard and do right, shouldn't there be a pay off? Maybe not money or status, but shouldn't there be spiritual satisfaction and peace of mind? Shouldn't I have fewer troubles?

Most of us understand the fallacy of predestination. Good fortune is not a sign that we are among God's chosen. Yet we act as if good works deserve immediate rewards and sinful behavior deserves swift punishment.

It doesn't work that way. The rain falls alike on the heads of the just and the unjust. When the Tsunami hits, it takes everyone in its path. Early death comes to the righteous and the evildoers. Pain and suffering don't discriminate.

Moses and Martin Luther King *did* receive their rewards. They wanted to bring their people to the Promised Land and they did. The gold medal isn't important, the accomplishment that led to the gold medal is important. The gold medal is just a commemoration.

A couple of years ago I went to a retreat house run by the Cistercian monks at the Holy Cross Abbey in Berryville, Virginia. I spoke to an old monk there, Father Mark. He died last year. Fr. Mark talked to me about the different kinds of prayer. He mentioned praise, gratitude, petition, confession, and contemplation. The last kind of prayer he mentioned is what came to me as I struggled to prepare this reflection. Father Mark said that doing whatever it is that you have been called to do is a prayer. If I had heard that before, I'd forgotten it.

Doing what I am called to do is a prayer. It is my life's work. And it is its own reward. My calling sustains me. What is my calling? I have spent way too much time thinking about that question. There are several answers.

I am called to be a husband. I must help Evelyn and I must accept help from her. I love Evelyn and I let her love me. I am a father. I love Moe and Jacinta. I try to give them what they need. And I try to respect them doing what they are called to do.

I work in Juvenile Court. I want to leave it a better place than I found it. I am a healer and a conciliator.

What's interesting is the ordinariness of all this. There are successes and there are failures. There are disappointments and unexpected challenges. No matter. My job is to do what I am called to do. The only real failure is if I stop doing what I am called to do.

So that's what I have drawn from the stories of Moses and Martin Luther King. Each saw the Promised Land but died before entering it. Neither needed to enter. Each had already accomplished his objective.

I won't reach the Promised Land. In my case, I have yet to figure out what my promised land is. If God let me see it, I wouldn't understand what I was seeing.

The ordinary tasks I am called to do will never be completed. There is always more to do. Father Mark was over 90 when he counseled me. When I die, more will be left undone. That may seem bittersweet, but it isn't. We are not called to achieve an objective and then sit back to admire our work. Our calling may change as our life changes, but our calling never ends.

6th Hour

ESTHER – A Great Role Model

Cathy Bunting

The book of Esther tells the story of a Jewish heroine who became Queen during the reign of King Xerxes or (Ahasuerus) of Persia in the 5th Century B.C. The purpose of the book is didactic; the glorification of the Jewish people and the origin of the feast of Purim and its date on the 14th - 15th of Adar. As in many scripture stories the Sinful are punished and the Virtuous are raised up. It also reminds us that God's providence is always present and that God never abandons His people.

Esther is like a female Joseph, one who is taken to a foreign pagan land at a young age but through Divine providence is raised up to save her people. Like Moses, she saves them not only from slavery but also from being slaughtered.

Why is it that we do not hear as much about the heroine Esther as we do about the male heroes? How many children can tell you about David & Goliath and David in the lion's den, but have no idea about Esther & Mordecai? We at St. Vincent's were blessed at one of our summer scripture series to have the story proclaimed as we, like the Jews, participated with loud noisemakers and shouts to drown out the name of Haman, the evil one, and cheered for Mordecai, the virtuous. Jewish children grow up with this great story and celebrate yearly the festival of Purim.

Esther is a great role model, especially for young women. She, like Mary, had important and very difficult things asked of her when she was very young. Esther is probably only 14 yrs. old when the story begins, but we see her making major decisions in a mature manner. Even the high and mighty King Ahasuerus does not seem as strong and independent. He says to Haman, "Do with the Jews as seems good to you," and turns to his advisors and says, "What do I do now?"

At first, Esther seems passive and obeys Mordecai's order not to reveal that she is a Jew. But when she hears of his public mourning she investigates why, while the King does not even ask Queen Vashti why she would not come to his banquet. She probably did not want to be paraded as an object before all the men who had been drinking for 7 days. Esther realistically grasps the great dangers she faces by going to the King at his request, but she also realizes that she can only save her people by risking her own life.

Esther knows that she cannot do this alone. So she asks Mordecai and all the Jews to fast for 3 days. In humility, she and her maids also fast. Then she turns to God for help. He alone can give her strength and empower her for this arduous mission. Esther is perceptive in knowing that the King considers all his subjects as property and loves Esther for her beauty. So she is wise to first ask the King to spare her life even though she is a Jew and to ask in wording that would be acceptable: "If I have found favor with you and it pleases your majesty; I ask that my life be spared." Then, recognizing the importance of timing, she asks that he also spare the life of her people. She does not allow power to go to her head and think that she can do it all. So she delegates and designates Mordecai as the caretaker of Haman's estate.

Esther is a good role model for us. If God can use a young woman who seems to have no power, lives in a hostile foreign environment and is alone except for an Uncle, then God can also use us; wherever we are, even if the circumstances seem impossible; even if we are afraid, afraid even to the point of losing our life. She is an example that with God all things are possible. Esther followed the 2 Great Commandments, Love God and Love your Neighbor, and like Jesus, she offered her life to save her people. What better role model?

Book Review For the son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter, niece, nephew, godchild in your life

The Action Bible. Doug Mauss (ed.) Sergio Cariello (illustrator). This is a compilation of the stories of Jewish Scriptures and New Testament –
in Graphic Novel Format.

Available from Amazon for 14.99. Audio book 19.79

Anne Maura writes:

I bought this as an experiment for my two nephews, aged 9 ½ and 12. I was clear to myself—and to them—that this really doesn't do justice to the religious meaning of the Bible. My purpose was what might be called “biblical literacy” (a la Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* a few years back.) It also doesn't cover the entire Bible—only sections with story content.

I also stressed with them that our family's “brand” of Bible readers don't believe that every story in the Bible is historical. Like Jesus, the Bible tells stories to make a point. Sometimes stories that people really liked got exaggerated and added to over the years (like Americans did with George Washington and the cherry tree). What these tell us is how people *felt* about the stories.

My personal reaction is that sometimes what's conveyed (e.g., the characters' motivation in their supposed thoughts, or God's motivation) is an interpretation that I wouldn't put in there. I've broached that too, mentioning that not everyone interprets the Bible stories the same way and when you use the Bible as a *faith* book, how you understand the reasons for what happens is important.

But it's a graphic novel format. The illustrations are in dynamic color and absolutely wonderful for that genre.

So back to my experiment . . . Ten days ago I announced I had brought it and left it casually in the family room – no pressure. My presumption being that “You should read this” is the kiss of death.

My brother and sister-in-law report that the 9 ½-year-old is reading it every chance he gets. I'm going to have to buy another copy because the 12-year-old wants to read it and the 9 ½-year-old is only up to I Samuel so it's going to be awhile. Did I mention it's **graphic novel** format?

Best of all the 9 1/2 –year-old now talks confidently about Isaac. And Joshua. And Deborah. And Saul.

I know there will come a time, the “So what?” age, when the mere stories will not be enough. But at least they will have a common fund of stories to talk about on a more serious level.

One disclaimer: Because so many of the Bible stories are “action” stories, I'm not sure if some girls will have as positive a reaction. You can look inside the book for sample pages on Amazon.

Amazon Info:

Reading level: Ages 9-12 **Hardcover:** 752 pages

Publisher: David C. Cook; New edition (September 1, 2010)

ISBN-13: 978-0781444996 **Product Dimensions:** 10.3 x 6.9 x 1.4 inches

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars _ ([87 customer reviews](#))