

Discover what Jesus means in our lives

In the previous communications, we looked at our vision describing where we want our parish to be. To achieve this vision, we would need to exploit our strengths and address our improvement opportunities. Here we saw the value of the survey many of you participated in.

The Pastoral Planning committee made up of members from both Our Lady of the Lakes and St. Mary and St. Joseph Parishes studied the survey results and together identified three areas that if prioritized would guide the creation of action plans that would move our parishes toward the vision. Though none of the priorities were deemed more important than the other, there was a sequence of execution that made more sense. Therefore, this communication will focus on the first of the identified priorities.

When we look at the survey results, it was interesting to note that a majority of respondents stated they had a personal relationship with Jesus. However, those same respondents indicated they felt inadequate when asked to tell Jesus' story and their personal story how Jesus had impacted their lives.

Telling one's personal faith story is the basis of all evangelism. This example is illustrated throughout the New Testament where Jesus' disciples not only tell Jesus story but how Jesus had impacted their own lives. Those listening would hear the power of Jesus in the disciples lives and would want to experience that same peace and joy. In this Jubilee Year of the Church, becoming Pilgrims of Hope is possible through our discipleship, spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to our community. However, this is not possible if we are not confident in Jesus' story or our own.

This is why our first priority, **Discover what Jesus means in our lives**, is where we must start our journey. Can any of us hope to tell Jesus' story if we are not familiar with it? His story is beautifully told through the Gospel but if our only exposure is through the scripture readings at weekly mass, then we miss the subtleties and nuances that become apparent when we are exposed to the bigger picture. This picture is not only found in the Gospel but through the ties to the rest of the Old and New Testament. One purpose of the homily is to help us make these connections as well as putting them into the context of our daily lives. But again, a 20 minute weekly homily is not sufficient to fill in all of these gaps.

Bible study then becomes a critical component of our efforts to become productive disciples. I am sure many of you engage in daily scripture reading and this is good. These private sessions allow one to personalize God's Word making associations with events in our daily lives. However, our interpretations are unfortunately limited to our own experiences. One of the most common statements I hear from those not attending church is, 'I don't need to go to church to know God.' Though this may be true, to truly understand His will requires a broader perspective. We are a community of believers for a reason. It is in the diversity of perspective and breadth of experience of the whole community that we come to appreciate God's plan for us.

Putting it a different way, there is great value in sharing our perspectives on the scriptures with each other. Not only does this require our acknowledging other viewpoints, but in sharing our thoughts we are learning how to communicate what Jesus means in our lives. We are actually practicing to be disciples of Christ within the safe space of the community of believers.

As we look to venture forth into the larger community around us, consider the kinds of questions we have been asked to answer any time we try to spread God's word. Why do you go to church every week (or every day in some cases)? What do you get out of the time you

spend at mass? Why do you believe Jesus is alive? Where do you get your emotional and spiritual strength? Why is it important to worship with others? Questions like these can often catch us off guard and put us on the defensive. We may even see these as attacks on our own beliefs when in many cases these are simply questions from a person truly looking for God in their lives.

Perhaps you have never considered an answer to these questions. You may have many more questions of your own. There are really no canned answers that one can memorize in response to those you will encounter through your evangelism. Your response will be deeply personal and will only come after much prayer, reflection, study and sharing with others. 'Who do you say that I am' was the question Jesus posed to his disciples after they had experienced significant exposure to his ministry. I often wonder what conversations went on between the disciples and with Jesus. What arguments did they get into? How did they voice their uncertainties about Jesus and His ministry. I want to believe Jesus did not lecture but instructed, encouraging open debates and challenges to His ministry but in the end, leading each disciple to, a closer relationship with God.

In the end, it was Peter who replied to Jesus' question, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" Jesus pointed out to all that this answer was not the result of man's perception but God's revelation. Peter had answered the question we are all asked to answer, "What does Jesus mean in our lives?" Each of our answers will be different as each one reflects our own personal relationship with Jesus.

Let's not wait till the question is posed before we formulate our answer. I pointed out 4 actions that will help us build our response. First, there is prayer. We must learn to engage in communication with God through the Holy Spirit. Take the time ask Him your questions but be sure to listen for His answer. Second, reflect on His answers. How do I personalize my response so that it becomes part of my internal being. Third, study; not just the scriptures but many resources that will become available to you. Finally, share your response with others and listen to their answers as well. Join with them in open dialogue building on the common while leveraging our differences to create a broad and inclusive landscape.

As we approach Lent, Father Dave will be opening a number of opportunities to explore what Jesus means in our lives. Please look to take advantage of these opportunities to help each of us define what Jesus means in our lives. Again, if any one would like to take a more active role in our journey toward the parish vision, please let Father Dave know. Our next two communications will focus on the remaining priorities identified by the Pastoral Planning Committee. Previous communications can be found on the parish web site.