

Visioning Homily 3 – Saint Joseph Parish, Mechanicsburg, PA
 “What’s better: Black and white, or color?” Rev. Thomas J. Rozman

Here is one of the best prayers that I’ve ever heard, and it came from a young student: “Dear God, please help me be the person my dog thinks I am.” Isn’t that true????

We’ve been talking about Parish Transformation. Last week we took a brief look at Jesus’ **Great Commission**, focusing on his directive to **make** disciples, and that being a disciple is a lifelong process. Being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is for everyone, not just the few.

I’ve already given you 2 visioning homilies, during which you’ve learned a Greek word and a Latin phrase. Today, how about this word: MANGIA! That’s right. *Italiano*. MANGIA! EAT! Probably the most favorite word that any Italian Grandmother uses, right? MANGIA!

Have you ever been with a group of friends, and you are deciding where to go for dinner? One of you says, “I’m hungry for a burger.” Another says, “I’m hungry for Italian.” Another says, “I’m hungry for wings.” I normally say to **each** of those ideas, “Me too, me too!” I’m game for just about any type of food. We hunger in a physical sense – our stomachs want to be satisfied. And, the fellowship that goes along with a meal with friends enhances our time together. But, we also hunger in the spiritual sense. We realize that we have other, inner cravings that want to be satisfied. Something within us is looking for completion, for fulfillment, for happiness. Do we always look for the best ways to satisfy **those** cravings? Where can we find that satisfaction, that happiness, that contentment? It was Saint Augustine who said, “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in You.”

Our Catholic faith assures us that God loves every one of us, sinful as we are. But, God did not abandon us to ourselves. Instead, God sent His Son, who gave up His life for us, so much does He love us. Hopefully we all make the daily decision to follow this Lord, who loves us even to the point of death. (*To those of you reading this, this is the KERYGMA.*)

Our Parish Mission Statement says that we, as this specific community of faith, “grow disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ.” So, what exactly is a disciple?

Let’s take a look at today’s Gospel to get a glimpse of who Jesus is, and what a disciple is. Jesus used stories and images that attracted His

listeners. Anything to do with farming would have struck a chord within His audience, since they depended so much on the produce of the land. In the parable, the sower of the seed is Jesus Himself. The seed is Faith. We are the ground, a ground that either accepts this seed and allows it to grow, or the thorny or unhealthy ground that rejects and smothers that seed. I know that all of us want to be that good, fertile ground. But, God has given us a free will. We have the freedom to choose – to either allow the seed to grow within us, or to disregard what God has planted in our hearts. We can all freely choose how to respond. Jesus won't force us. What do you think a disciple does with this seed?

Our invitation on this discipleship journey is not just to believe in Jesus, but to love him and to be in love with him, to feel that we belong to, and with, Him. Only then will our hearts burn with that fire of faith, and we will encounter Him as alive and real. When we open our hearts, as does the fertile ground to the seed, to allow this Faith to grow in us, then we are true disciples.

And so, our process of Parish Transformation obviously must include a PERSONAL transformation. We will find ourselves changing for the better when we intentionally make that decision to follow the Lord Jesus not just when we feel like it, but every day. While a disciple is one who learns from and is led by the Lord, Our Lord also wants to walk with us on this journey. To take us by the hand and assure us that He is always there. And God has called every one of us to follow as Catholic disciples. God specifically wants us to be as Catholic as possible.

And so, a most important facet of this parish and our own personal transformation journeys here at Saint Joseph's is: to love Jesus, and to fall in love with Him. This week I ask you to reflect on the question: **Am I in love with Jesus?** If you find that difficult to answer, then I propose that you read the Gospels – begin reading Saint Matthew, a chapter or two each day, and continue until you come to the end of Saint John's Gospel. Highlight the passages that speak to your heart. The Sacred Scriptures are the primary source for our relationship with Jesus. And remember: A dusty Bible is the devil's best friend... As a supplement to the Gospels, I would recommend, as we did 2 Christmases ago – that you read, and even re-read, Matthew Kelly's Book Rediscover Jesus from Dynamic Catholic.

In my experience, there seem to be a lot of people who feel that if they have a Baptismal certificate, that's all they need to be Catholic. On a

certain level, that is true. Once a Catholic, always a Catholic. But, aren't we all about **following** Jesus to eternal salvation? Jesus calls all of us to BE disciples. I am so saddened to see that those who are "inactive Catholics" do not follow the discipleship journey that Jesus has invited them to travel when they were baptized into the Catholic Church. Look at what they are missing. How do we have a relationship with anyone if we spend hardly any time with them?

That reminds me of a story. The Abbot of a Trappist monastery was having a talk with a very worldly **un**believer. The man said, "Abbot, I never go to Church. There are too many hypocrites there." The Abbott replied, "O, don't let that keep you away. There's always room for one more, you know."

And so, where is there a need for personal transformation in your life?

Being baptized is not the same as being in love with Jesus, of having a relationship with Jesus. And while we may have some difficulties with some aspect of our Church, we have to remember, as Pope Francis puts it so beautifully, that the Church is not a museum for saints. The Church is a field hospital for sinners. We are here **not** because we are sin-less saints, but **because** we are fellow disciples on the journey, as weak as we are, looking to fall more and more in love with Jesus, and be transformed spiritually, as we grow in our relationship with Him.

It's like the difference between a black and white movie, verses a color movie. I remember the very first time I watched "The Wizard of Oz." I think we all had that same surprised reaction the first time we saw Dorothy opening the door after landing in Oz. The world of color makes all the difference. (On a side note, I **would** argue, though, that some of the best movies I've seen are those golden oldies in black and white.) But the world of color makes all the difference. Being in love with the Lord Jesus makes all the difference in our life as a Catholic. If we could more fully realize how deeply we are loved by Jesus, there would be fewer and fewer Catholics every week who would be utterly convinced that they are missing nothing when they miss Sunday Mass. When we realize that I am in love with Jesus, and that Jesus is in love with me, coming to Mass will not be seen as a duty. Coming to Mass will not be done out of fear of committing a sin. Coming to Mass will take priority over all those other important things I convince myself that I must do on the weekend. Instead of being bored or distracted, we will look forward to the experience that is meant to fill us up in

order for us to return to our daily lives, now empowered by the grace of the Word of God, and especially the Eucharist, commissioned to live our Catholic life to the full.

The program that we run here, ALPHA, asks the question: **Is there more to life than this?** Ask yourself that question. Maybe you are the one who would benefit by participating in this program that will help you answer that question for yourself, and open the doors to something new, exciting, and even colorful in your Catholic faith. Please pick up a brochure about ALPHA in the narthex.

OK. I'll now bring this plane in for a landing.

I am really excited about this Parish Transformation journey that we have begun. Just imagine if more and more of the 7,500 Catholics listed in our parish census would join our worship every week. Just imagine if we invited someone totally new to come and celebrate with us. Just imagine if a family member is looking for a way to return, and your invitation, maybe to ALPHA, is the nudge they need. Just imagine if we all opened our hearts more to the Holy Spirit and realize that while we come here to Mass to be fed, we also have something to give when we are sent from this assembly. Last week I talked about those final words of the Mass. In Latin: "Ite Missa est." You are being sent on a mission at the end of every Mass. Just imagine if people would be asking you, "What's happening, over there at Saint Joe's?" Just imagine what the Lord Jesus has in store for our Saint Joseph Community if we would all take our discipleship journey just a bit more seriously each day, as we look for the grace of both Personal and Parish Transformation.