

Reality Check WEEK FIVE February 6, 2022

I've been watching a documentary on the

Disney Channel titled, Welcome To Earth.

It stars Will Smith, who you might know from the 'Men In Black' films.

In Welcome to Earth, he travels the globe

to explore some of our world's greatest wonders.

In one episode he hikes down to the rim of an active volcano

that's spouting out huge boulders.

In another he travels to the bottom of the ocean in a tiny submarine.

Now, if you've seen any Will Smith movies, you know he often plays a strong, confident character.

But in Welcome to Earth, he is clearly outside of

his comfort zone, confronting some of his deepest fears.

In one episode he shares this quote from his grandmother:

SCREEN: God places the best things in life on the other side of fear

In other words, he had to be willing to confront and move past his fears in order to discover the beauty of our world.

God places the best things in life on the other side of fear.

We've come to the final week of our message series titled, Reality Check.

A reality check is when you realize the truth about a situation - when a misconception you had gets corrected.

We've heard that God wants us to see ourselves as his loving children and to see others as our brothers and sisters.

And how we need to get out of our echo chambers in order to do this.

Last week, Fr. Kennedy talked about the synod now taking place in the Church and how important it is to make our voices heard.

Our series concludes today with an important message from Jesus on how we must live in the real world everyday.

Let's turn to the Gospel story.

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So we heard that Jesus was in Capernaum,

a village in Israel beside the Sea of Galilee - also called the Lake of Gennesaret.

Jesus's ministry was just getting started,
but he'd already earned quite a reputation.

He cured a man who was possessed by demons,
and he healed a lot of people who were sick - including Simon Peter's mother-in-law.

Then one day, Jesus was walking along the seaside and
saw some fishermen washing their nets.

He got into a boat belonging to Simon and preached to the crowd.

Then he told him to go out into deeper water and lower his nets.

At first Simon was reluctant - he and his partners had been
fishing all night and caught nothing.

But this was Jesus making the request - the same man who had healed
his mother-in-law and others in his town.

So he did as Jesus instructed.

And he caught so many fish that his nets were at the breaking point.

When they returned to land, Simon realized he was in the presence of God.

He became aware of his unworthiness and begged Jesus to leave him.

Instead, Jesus said this to Simon:

**SCREEN: "Do not be afraid;
from now on you will be catching men."**

**When they brought their boats to the shore,
they left everything and followed him.**

Every time I read this, I'm amazed by the response of these fishermen.

They left everything and followed him.

They literally dropped their nets and headed off in a new direction.

They didn't need time to think about it.

Didn't go home to pack.

They simply left everything and followed Jesus,
not knowing where they were headed or what they'd find.

This required courage - they had to overcome their fear of leaving
their old lives behind.

But it also required trust.

Trust in the one they would be following.

Trust that he wouldn't lead them astray.

That he would be with them through it all - that they wouldn't be alone.

And trust that what they'd discover would be worth any sacrifices they'd be making.

And what did they find on the other side of their fears?

Some pretty amazing things:

they saw the sick healed, the dead raised, the hungry fed,

sinner reconciled, and outsiders welcomed.

And most importantly, crucifixion that ended in resurrection.

Their story is a powerful reality check of what is possible when

we are willing to seek out the life God wants for us.

And the life God wants for us must include others.

God doesn't want us going through life alone - thinking, *"I don't need anyone else."*

Even Jesus knew he needed companions on his journey.

It's one reason why he called those fishermen and others to follow him.

He needed friends and helpers and so do we.

God made us for relationship - it's in our DNA, it's how we are wired.

We are people who need people.

Other people help us find happiness.

They help us feel safe and secure in life.

Others can encourage us and care for us on our bad days.

And others can challenge us to grow and become the best version of ourselves.

Today's Gospel teaches us how essential relationships are

for anyone who would follow Jesus.

As one pastor said,

SCREEN: you can't grow spiritually unless you are connected relationally

You can't grow spiritually unless you are connected relationally.

Here at St. Pius, you are more than a number, more than a face in the crowd.

We want you to be known, to be able to have friends who actually know you and

care about what is happening in your life.

We want other people to count on you.

And we want you to grow.

We think the best way to do all of that is to join a small group.

In fact, we believe that small groups are so important that we've designed all of our faith formation around them, for those in Kindergarten through adults.

Small groups are 6-12 adults who meet weekly for about an hour to an hour and a half.

They pray together, discuss the message from Mass, and support each other in their journey of discipleship.

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Where did this idea of small groups come from?

Today's Gospel gave us the answer.

When Jesus invited the fishermen to follow him, he was forming the first small group in the Church.

He settled on twelve individuals who would journey with him all the way to Calvary.

Then, after his Ascension, they carried on his ministry.

Jesus was giving his followers a model for keeping his mission alive and growing the Kingdom.

God didn't make us to go through life alone.

He made us for each other.

He wants us to be in relationship with each other.

Small groups is one great way that this can happen.

Over the years at St. Pius, we have issued many invitations for you to try out a small group.

Today I'm asking you to consider joining a Lenten small group.

Lent starts next month, so you can sign up now for a group that will start meeting in two weeks and then meet weekly throughout Lent.

Most of our small groups are meeting online so

no matter where you live, you can join.

What holds some people back from trying a small group?

These are some of the concerns I've heard over the years:

Will I like the people in my small group?

Will I fit in?

Will they understand me and how complicated my life has been?

Can I trust them?

If you tried out a small group in the past
and it wasn't what you thought it would be
you might be afraid of recommitting.

And some of the concerns are practical,
like, *can I find the time to commit?*

Take it from me, I know these are real concerns.

When I joined a men's small group seven years ago, I had
every single one of them.

Being a priest in a small group with parishioners, I was afraid
I wouldn't fit in or that they wouldn't be able to relate to my life.

At first I was afraid to trust.

And I was really afraid that I wouldn't be able to find the time to commit.

I am so glad that God helped me overcome my fears and concerns.

Being in a small group is an amazing experience.

It has been so incredible for me, that I want everyone to try one.

What can you find on the other side of your fears about a small group?

Ideally, a small group will keep you honest and on track.

The voice of others can be really instrumental in making sure
you are hearing God's voice and following Christ.

So please, consider trying a small group.

Think about it, pray about it, then sign up.

SCREEN: God places the best things in life on the other side of fear

Push past anything that is holding you back from the life

God wants for you.

Be willing to try something new, trusting and believing that
God will lead you to great things. Amen. +