

I heard this “story” Monday night at Hops and Hope. It was early December and Jimmy knew what he wanted for Christmas. He wanted a shiny new red bike. So, Jimmy sat down to write a letter to Santa. He wrote, “*Dear Santa,*” and then stopped and crumpled up the paper.

For only 9 years old, Jimmy was pretty shrewd. Rather than writing a letter to Santa, he thought, I should write to Jesus. So, he wrote, “*Dear Jesus, I really want that red bike for Christmas, so I’ll be good for a whole month.*” He paused and crumpled up the letter. Then he wrote, “*Dear Jesus, I really want that red bike for Christmas, so I’ll be good for a whole week.*” He paused and then crumpled up the letter. Then he wrote, “*Dear Jesus, I really want that red bike for Christmas, so I’ll be good for a whole day.*” He paused and then crumpled up the letter.

Jimmy decided to go to a friend’s house, which took him past St. Joseph Parish. He saw the life size creche out in front of the church. He walked up to it, bent down, and picked up the statue of Mary and took it home. He put the statue in his room next to his desk. He grabbed another piece of paper and wrote: “*Dear Jesus, if you ever want to see you mother again...*”

It’s **unwise** to think we can make deals with God. But when we **humbly follow** the will of God **in faith**, we then live with the **wisdom** of the saints.

The readings today tell us how important trust and faith are, especially when responding to **invitations** offered to us through the Holy Spirit. We heard how Ahaz failed to respond to God’s invitation, and then of Joseph’s response, despite his serious dilemma. Joseph’s response is a great model of faith.

Like Ahaz, sometimes we too, find nice sounding reasons to pass on **invitations** to do God’s will. One Ahaz moment for me, was when I was encouraged to serve as a Communion Minister at another parish. I responded to their invitation with appreciation but said I just didn’t feel worthy to serve in such an important ministry.

Then just weeks later I heard Bishop Ricken celebrating Mass. He was saying the words in the Eucharistic Prayer, where the pope and bishop’s names are said. He said, “*For Benedict our Pope, and me, your unworthy servant.*” Those words struck me. Our bishop referred to himself as an unworthy servant. It got me to **rethink** the **invitation** to be a Communion Minister. It was one of many **invitations** I accepted, while discerning the diaconate.

Not like Joseph's leap, but we are also **invited** to take leaps of faith. The Holy Spirit sends people and opportunities across our path much more often than we realize. With this awareness, **in faith** we can respond to invitations, making the world a little better, and moving our souls a little closer to God.

Last summer I took a leap of faith, when St. Bernadette Parish in Appleton was hosting a Relics of St. Bernadette tour. Their priest and deacon both had commitments during a portion of the tour schedule, so they **invited** me to participate.

The people leading the tour explained what they wanted me to do. Some of the things I had not done before. So, it would have been easy to be like Ahaz, take a pass, and refer someone else with more experience.

On the last day of the tour, while talking with the tour hosts, one of them said, "*we've not done this before, but you could lead a Eucharistic Procession through the church before Adoration.*" I hadn't done that before, but was very open to doing it that day.

While processing through the church, the server and I stopped to bless the people in each section, making the sign of the cross with Jesus in the monstrance. When the procession ended, Jesus was placed on the altar for adoration.

A storm was forecasted in Appleton that day. The church was dimly lit for Adoration, and as the storm approached it got dark outside. Jesus was on the altar in the monstrance, and behind him was a very large round stained-glass window. Lightening began to flash outside the window, and a few times we heard **and felt**, prolonged rolling thunder pass over the church. I trembled in awe at God's presence. Sometimes leaps of faith bring unexpected surprises.

Afterwards, a man approached me and shared, that when the Eucharistic Procession stopped in front of him, he experienced a **warmth** that surrounded him and held him.

How do some people spend time with Jesus, who is truly present in the tabernacle and monstrance? St. John Vianney heard **this** answer, when he asked a person whom he saw spending hours in church in front of the tabernacle. The person simply replied, "*I look at him and he looks at me.*" Mother Teresa's sisters spend an hour each morning gazing at Jesus in the Eucharist, before they go out into the world, to see Jesus in each person they encounter.

Despite knowing the story of our Salvation, its mystery still requires taking the risk of faith. Despite all the times, year after year, that we have celebrated the birth of Jesus, we still do not fully comprehend it.

We are at the threshold of another Christmas. How will we enter it this year? With a deeper faith and commitment, or will we merely participate in the external celebration?

As we begin this final week of Advent, I **invite you** to come to Sacred Heart Church Sunday afternoon and spend some time with Jesus at Eucharistic Adoration.