

EVERYDAY DISCIPLESHIP
Sunday, June 22ND, 2008 – Grace Church, Haddonfield
Rev. Dr. Patrick R. Close

I am becoming increasingly alarmed at how people view Christianity. We seem content to let some people define what it means to be a Christian, and in too many ways, it does not reflect the reality of what we believe and live. Matthew is speaking to his Church, and to let, in the face of persecution and difficulties. Jesus warns us today that following him every day will not be easy. This runs counter to the messages I see from the television evangelists who promise us success and happiness, especially if we send out money to them!

We are being challenged to live our faith daily, to become every day disciples of Jesus Christ, not just occasional visitors. It's time for us to live the message and it's time for us to speak up. If we don't, others will define, or rather misrepresent, our faith.

In one of Fr. Bill Tully's messages from St. Bartholomew's Church shares a story that helps me to understand what is being asked of us. It has to do with a former manager of the Baltimore Orioles. I must confess I'm an old Baltimore fan, well before Cal Ripken. My heroes on those teams were all named Robinson! Earl Weaver was being taunted by reporters at Memorial Stadium (before Camden Yards was built). One reporter said, "You know Earl, baseball is no longer the national past time. Now it's football!" "Naw," said Earl, "They just have a few weekly gladiator contests. This is baseball. We do it every day.

What a wonderful notion for us! Our calling is to be faithful more than for an hour in this church once a week. We are being told to go out these doors into that world and live it every day! We are doing some of those things now at Grace Church. There are multiple services during the week; St. Paul's Food Ministry fills 100 bags of groceries each week to feed the hungry in Camden; we hold Sunday School, Vacation Bible School and more education events all year; we are home to another parish, Mt. Pisgah, while they rebuild after the fire destroyed their home; we are here every day ... are we disciples every day?

The challenge for us is to be followers of Jesus Christ every day. We must be counter cultural, make changes in the way we think and live to be centered in God. Where are we in our faith right now? Is it something we live all the time and demonstrate every day? It would help us to take stock of how we are living our faith and see if there is something more or different that we could be doing.

The cultural norms don't apply. We are coming into the summer season, and the shifts that take place force many churches to almost stop functioning. I remember my first Church in Montclair, New Jersey. I came from Virginia where I had to do MORE in the summer because the kids were out of school and there were MORE people in Church on Sunday! I remember the first Sunday of summer. Half the congregation was gone! What happened! What did I do? Was it a fluke? Did I do something wrong? I checked with my wife Diane, and she couldn't help me with the problem, so I decided to see what happened next week.

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The next Sunday came, and it was the same. Now I was really confused. After Church, I headed up to Watchung Plaza to get bagels and donuts. There sitting in the shop were many of the missing parishioners! I asked them why there were not in Church, one soul spoke up, “Oh father! We take the summer off from Church!” This is not the attitude of every day discipleship. God doesn’t take the summer off from us. The Church doesn’t stop being the Church because of an arbitrary date on the calendar. I know some people would like the Church to shut down for the summer, but we do ministry here every day.

I’m glad we will take vacations to relax and refresh. These are good things. But our faith still needs to be lived out every day. God doesn’t leave us for the summer ... why do we leave God? Why not visit a new Church while we are on vacation? God can be part of our summer rituals and renewals. God is there at the shore or in the mountains. Take a little time to visit a Church on Sunday morning. Bring back their newsletter and bulletins. Be part of the greater faith community and practice every day discipleship.

Make the Church a way of life. Fr. Bill Tully talks about the need to create 52 equal Sundays every year. That’s my goal for Grace. We never know when people might visit or need to be part of the faith community, to be here in Church. We are so obsessed with being able to communicate 24/7, 365 days of the year ... now it’s time to live a life of faith that demonstrates an every day discipleship!