

THE HOMILY THAT ISN'T - AUG 10, '08
Deacon colleen

There was a time when I sat in the pews as a “regular” person. And as that “regular” parishioner I did what every parishioner does during the sermon or homily. As I listened to the priest or whoever was giving their sermon, I wrote my check for the envelope, and when I was finished with that I looked at my watch, and when I finished looking at my watch I read the bulletin, and when I finished that I looked around to see who was in church and what they were wearing, and if the kids were by this time squirming, I gave them the look that said “RELAX!”, AND I did all this while appearing to be listening to the homilist.

And I sometimes I really did hear and listen to the sermon. I usually got SOMETHING from it, really. Fr. Wayne Smith was our priest at St. Bart's, and if you know him, you know that he is a really cool guy, always adding humor to his sermon, always keeping your attention. But really, how long can one person really concentrate on one thing? I mean, after all, we are a society of multi-tasking, and especially we women, we can do more than one thing at a time. Truth be known, our kids are probably texting their friends right now!

Well, that was all another life ago. I look back now and see that I did not appreciate the person in the pulpit. It is now as an ordained person that I see and notice how much work and time a priest or a deacon, or a layperson for that matter, puts into their homilies.

I have seen Fr. Pat go into his house with his materials on the day he has set aside for his study, his synthesis, his various translations of scripture, his notes, and other things he uses as reference materials for his sermons. I know that he spends a lot of time preparing his Sunday messages.

I have watched Mother Debbie straining in her office trying to put together a meaningful sermon. She works real hard trying to pull together something that will contribute to a thought-full service. She may be good at hiding it, but I know as a new priest she is still very nervous about her new role and wants to do the best job she can, she wants to do it right. She is a dedicated new clergy person.

Now we all know that the truth is that by lunch time probably nobody remembers what the sermon was about. How many of you go home and during lunch have a discussion about the sermon they heard in church that morning? Hey kids, what do you do think about what Deacon Colleen had to say today?

How many go to sleep on Sunday night really ruminating over something that nudged you, something that you can't stop thinking about, something thought provoking about the sermon that morning?

Probably in 99 % of the cases, nobody will remember the sermon by dinner, and the hard work that the person in the pulpit put into that homily, well, it could be classified as a waste of time, except to the homilist, because any good person in the pulpit worth their salt wants to do their best, and be on target, whether anybody gets it or not, BUT still the truth might be that the only person that really gets a whole lot from the sermon is the person giving it.

In my case my husband Dave has to hear my homily a few times before Sunday, first to time it, don't want to be too long, second to give me his critique, which sometimes I listen to.

So I have decided not to give a homily today. It's summertime, we all got places to get to after church, the pool, the beach, the backyard.

Anyway, the scripture for today doesn't offer any real thoughts or insight. It's all about faith and trust, and after all we are the longtime people of Grace, right? As informed Bible readers, as experienced church leaders we know all there is to know about faith and trust, right? Why waste our valuable sun time, right?

BUT, just in case you're in need of some conversation material with the unchurched, we could talk about Matthew's message today. Just in case you were having family for dinner this week, and they wanted to know why and how you are faith-full to your God, why Jesus and not Muhammid, why Jesus ahead of money, why Jesus ahead of success, why is your faith important to you, you just might want to say,

“you know, today the Deacon read the Gospel, and it was about the disciples alone in a boat late into the night, and all of a sudden the waves grow large, a storm starts blowing them around, and they are afraid. Now these are guys that just witnessed Jesus divide up a small lunch and feed 5,000 people. Well, these disciples, they're slow learners. These are the guys that followed the Son of God around, gave up their livelihood to follow the guy they saw as the Messiah. And now they are taking on water and terrified. It appears as if they don't have any faith, let alone trust in their leader, for heaven's sake!

Then your neighbor or relative or whoever, maybe your heathen relative might be mesmerized and you've got them hooked and they say, “really! What happened next?”

Well, you're excited now, because you got them, they are talking about stuff now that matters. This is the conversation you've been waiting for, an opportunity to

show what you know, to share your faith, to bring a friend closer to Christ, right?!

Now's your chance to witness, something you have been chomping at the bit for, right? An opportunity to share your passion about your faith & trust in your God, right?

So maybe now you might add,

“yeah, and then the Deacon went on to say how Jesus came out and walked on the water to save his friends, and Peter, otherwise known as the Rock, jumped out of the water and started to join Jesus. And here's the tricky part, he would have done all right, Peter, if he had just kept his focus on Jesus, kept his trust in Jesus, but all of a sudden he lost it, he started to remember that he was walking on water, and he was afraid, and this fear overshadowed his faith, and lo and behold he started to sink. Imagine that?! Now he's sinking like a rock!!

And you add,

“Well, and well, that got me thinking, what if the boat were really our life? What if Jesus was calling me and you to jump out of our comfort zones, our boats, and walk with him, trusting he will make our life more valuable and rewarding than we could ever imagine, if we would only follow him, trust him, have faith in him. ?

What IF God was yelling to us, “HEY YOU! Come on over here, I got big plans for you?” Okay, you say, here I

am Jesus, what do you want of me? I am faithful, I am a follower, I am a believer, after all, I'm on vestry, I sing in the choir, I teach Sunday school, I am an usher, we pledge, we have work hard for the church."

Well, now it gets tricky, you see, because now Jesus wants more, Jesus wants us out of our boat, turns out he wants us walking with him.

"Really", says the neighbor? Yep – Jesus, nicknamed by a mystic called Kiekegaard as 'the Inviter' because wherever he was, and behind whatever he was doing, he was always inviting people to faith. So when Peter asks to come to Jesus on the water, Jesus, the Inviter, says, 'Come.' Step out of the boat, Come to me. Walk on faith.

And there he goes, from frustration to faith. Peter was leaving his life as he knew it, and stepping out to a place of surrender, and why, because he wanted to have faith, because he wanted to trust his God. God was saying, trust it, step out of the boat, hey, make a fool of yourself if need be, to explore the deep mystery of My kingdom.

There will be storms in your life, times when you feel yourself drowning in the pain that life may bring. Have faith, trust in me, FOCUS on ME!"

So, it turns out you can't grow in faith – take risks, change, and develop, and count on looking good all the time. In stepping out of the boat, Peter reminds us that in

order to be an agent, a partner with God, you must be willing to be a failure. Riskless Christianity, safe, stale, and old stagnant Christianity – stays in the boat. It is the prudent thing to do, probably, it might be sensible, it looks responsible and right, BUT we are unchanged. Living the Good News, the news of the Gospel means looking to Jesus as our definition for faith.

But all this would be for us to share with OTHER people, right? After all, we don't have any chaos or crises in our life, right? We are all healthy and rich and in secure in our relationships and jobs, right? Everything is rosy in our lives, right? We've got it all down, right? It's the other people who need to learn to jump out of their boat into a life of partnership with their God, right?

That's what I thought. That is why there is no homily today. Amen.