

HOMILY 22ND SUN OT YRB 2018

I want to start by reading something to you this morning.

We will welcome you regardless of your present status in the Catholic Church.
We will welcome you regardless of your current family situation or marital status.
We will welcome you if you are a staunch Catholic or do not like organized religion.

We will not judge you based upon your personal history,
age, race, ethnic background, appearance, sexual orientation or gender identity.

We welcome children, even when they act like children.

If there is no crying, our Parish is dying!

We are all on a spiritual journey, trying to find our way.

All are welcome to join us on our spiritual journey at St. Edith.

I wrote this a couple of years ago for the bulletin. We have been working on becoming more welcoming as a Parish Family for a long time. I wanted to express the fact that we really want to welcome everyone to our St. Edith Parish Family. I was not quite prepared for the reaction that I would get. It was overwhelmingly positive. That was not the surprise. The surprise to me was how many people told me how much they liked it both in person and by email, at the time and on an ongoing basis. That is why it is on the web site and in the bulletin every week. I received emails from the pastors of other parishes asking me if they could print it in their bulletins. I have people tell me that they were looking for a parish to join, and when they saw the welcome they thought that this was the parish for them. I did not think I was writing something exceptional, but it struck a chord in people.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus is being criticized because his disciples did not follow the hand washing ritual. That must have made them feel particularly welcome by the Jewish leaders! Just a little background on the rules. In helping people to apply the Ten Commandments to their lives, Rabbis developed a body of interpretations called the Talmud. These were a group of traditions about the Sabbath, clothing, marriage, business, work, worship and food that sustained the Jewish identity in the secular world. These traditions wove their faith into their daily lives. Regarding the hand washing ritual, people in Jesus' time knew nothing of bacteria and viruses, but some of their hygiene and dietary

practices protected them from diseases. Many of these interpretations were very good. The problem is that they got out of hand. The interpretations tended to be easily observable things that became ends in themselves. They forgot that the purpose of the Talmud was to help people apply the 10 Commandments to their daily lives. In fact, the Babylonian Talmud contained 60 volumes! Jesus was not criticizing the hand washing rituals; he was reminding the people of the purpose of the Talmud to begin with.

We have a Catholic culture as well. Our rules and interpretations are aimed at weaving our faith into our daily lives. The welcoming that I wrote is not new or revolutionary, but maybe it is something that we needed to be reminded of. We need to remember what ministry is about here at St. Edith. We are called to bring people to Jesus and into the Sacramental life of the Church. When people get here, we need to meet them where they are and lovingly walk the spiritual journey with them. We need to welcome everyone. If we welcomed only those who understood and believed everything the Catholic Church teaches and lives their lives accordingly, our Church would be empty. I think there is something in our Catholic culture that has made some people feel unwelcome. I have had many people over the years tell me that they no longer felt welcome in the Catholic Church after they got a divorce. Divorce does not change your status in the Catholic Church; you are still welcome and participate fully in the sacraments. So many divorced people have told me that they no longer felt welcome in the Catholic Church after divorce and for other reasons that we must be doing something to make them feel that way. I think we all need to look at ourselves and see if there is something we are doing to make people feel that way and change. That applies to any group that does not feel welcome. We need to welcome everyone into our church, just as they are. As we come closer to Jesus, we change our lives to be more and more in line with what Jesus taught us. This is what we are all going to spend the rest of our lives doing. Let's do it together and love and support each other. That is what Jesus is calling us to do.