

HOMILY 22ND SUN OT YRA 2017

In August of 2003, the Church of the Holy Cross in New York City was broken into and they stole a money box. That is what they are usually looking to steal, money. Three weeks later they broke in again and stole a 4 foot long, 200 lb plaster Jesus from the crucifix and left the cross. They were really perplexed by this. Why would they take Jesus and leave the cross? I think we know. We would sometimes like to do that as well, take Jesus, the one who created the world for us, who gave us life, who loves us unconditionally all of the time, who always forgives us, who provides for us and takes care of us. We would like to take Jesus and leave the cross.

Today in the Gospel reading Jesus says: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.” Taking Jesus and leaving the cross does not appear to be an option. Some of the crosses are thrust upon us, when someone we love dies, the loss of health, the loss of a job. Those crosses are there, the only question is how are we going to deal with them, how are we going to find meaning in them, how are we going to let good come from them. We can try to ignore them but we cannot really avoid them.

We also have crosses in our lives that are optional. These are some of the crosses that go along with being disciples of Jesus Christ. To take up these crosses we need to stop thinking the way humans think and start thinking the way that God thinks. In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells Peter that he is going to suffer on the cross, die, and be raised from the dead. He is trying to prepare Peter for what is going to happen. Peter responds: “God forbid Lord! No such thing will ever happen to you.” And Jesus responds: “Get behind me Satan!” He is telling him he must start thinking like God thinks. Last week in the Gospel reading Peter said: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This week he is telling Jesus what to do. And we can understand Peter’s response as human beings. Peter loved Jesus and wanted to protect him. I

probably would have responded the same way. Jesus had already made the decision to pick up the cross. He could have avoided it. He could have decided to give up his ministry, hide out in the hills and meet in secret with the apostles. Take the good part of his ministry and leave the cross, but he did not do that.

The last thing that Jesus told us before he ascended into heaven was: “Go out and make disciples of all people.” He told us to evangelize. Evangelization has been one of those optional crosses in my life. I have been trying to figure out how to do this for 20 years, before I was a priest, and I have not been terribly successful. More than once I wanted to leave that cross behind and just minister to all of you who are here. More than once God has told me that he wants me to get my parishioners to evangelize, that is there job, and then it is my job to minister to the people once they get here. I think here at St. Edith we have come closest to moving forward with evangelization. Evangelization is making personal contacts with other people and sharing our faith. Fliers and posters and web sites and faith formation programs can enhance this, but personal contacts with others are necessary. And we have made some good beginnings. Six years ago we only had coffee and donuts after the 8:30 Mass and people wanted to stop that because there was little participation. Today the hall is packed after the Sunday Masses and there is a lot of personal interaction going on there. Two years ago we started having a welcoming committee of people to welcome people at the weekend liturgies and share their experiences at St. Edith. We also have people contacting new parishioners to welcome them. This past summer we had a booth at the Livonia Spree to reach out to the community. These are all good things, but I think we have to continue to move forward.

Bishop Vigneron released a pastoral letter titled “Unleash the Gospel,” that outlines the efforts that we are going to take as an Archdiocese in the years ahead. We will be talking about

this pastoral letter at Coffee and Conversation this Wednesday at 7:00. We will also be talking about it the first Wednesday of October. I encourage everyone to come and find out more about it. I am also going to try and add additional people to the Evangelization Commission, where we will be discussing how to evangelize through personal contact at St. Edith. The meeting will be on Wednesday September 20th at 7:00. Please join us. I would like to encourage all those who participated in the booth at the Livonia Spree to come and share your experience. Are you ready to take up the cross and evangelize, or to you want to take Jesus and leave the cross?