

26th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Catholic Evangelization”

Fr. Frank Schuster

One of my favorite evangelical tools some churches employ is the clever use of a billboard sign. Have you seen those? King County won't let us have anything more than what we have already on the street without an expensive permitting process; otherwise, I'd consider it here. But, have you ever driven by some of the protestant churches and seen the signs next to the road with a witty evangelical saying? Here are a few I have discovered that I like.

“If God is your copilot, swap seats!” There is a deep thought, right? Another one was, “Forgive your enemies – it messes with their heads!” That is as good a reason as any I think. Another one was, “Honk if you love Jesus, text while driving if you want to meet him!” That is a pretty good public safety announcement. Amen to that, but my very favorite one was, “Tweet others like you would like to be tweeted”.

Why have I given you today some pearls of wisdom from some of these outdoor signs of other churches? Both the first reading and the Gospel reading compel me to do so. You see, in the book of Numbers, the Lord commanded Moses to gather 70 elders into the tent for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Eldad and Medad, although on the list, didn't go into the tent. The Holy Spirit, however, came to rest on Eldad and Medad outside the tent. Joshua, a very good rubricist, questioned the inclusion of Eldad and Medad, because they weren't in the tent. Moses responded, “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!” These are very interesting words from Moses in the Book of Numbers! And we have the same thing going on in the Gospel.

The Gospel begins with John sharing with Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us.” Jesus replied, “Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us.” Powerful words from our savior! There is urgency in the Lord's words in the Gospel reading. Salvation of souls is at stake.

As Catholics, we can sometimes get a bad rap for our efforts in the field of evangelization. Since we have about a billion Catholics out there, perhaps we don't feel the urgency. Perhaps we think we are too busy, isn't this someone else's responsibility? With all the horrible news of Church leaders behaving badly lately, maybe we feel embarrassed to share our Catholic faith with others? And, clearly, our Lord gave a commentary on that in our Gospel reading if you were listening. On the other hand, I don't know about you, but when it gets right down to it the reason why I am Catholic isn't because of some priest, bishop or pope per se. I am Catholic because of the witness of my parents, family members and friends who shared their love for the Lord with me. Not to downplay the influence priests, bishops and popes can have, especially when they are live their vocations faithfully, it is just that most people find their way to the Easter sacraments because of the loving and faithful witness of a family member or a friend. Just like Moses tells us today in the Book of Numbers, “Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!” Would that all of us share our faith in Jesus with the people in our lives!

My friends, what would happen if we were all evangelists? Think about it. What would happen if we were all missionaries? Think of all the ways we can share the Good News with the people around us? Who can we invite to Church on Sunday? Who can I reach out to and give a helping hand in a time of desperate need? The opportunities are exciting if we simply find the courage to act. If we all did one thing this week, what a gift this would be for Jesus wouldn't you say? And what a gift to our community as well if we all just did one thing! What a gift to our Lord and savior Jesus Christ if the best church billboard sign in our community was you by the example of your life! What would that look like?

And so along those lines, here are a few more church billboard signs I liked: "Remember that the rabbit foot did not work for the rabbit." "Stop, drop and roll doesn't work in hell" and, perhaps best of all, "You can't enter heaven unless Jesus enters you!"