

“Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Once upon a time, an army chaplain had just finished celebrating Mass at a cathedral in Europe. The theme of the homily was:

“Be proud of your Catholic faith; don’t be afraid to practice it in public.”

After the Mass, a sailor, obviously moved by the homily, stopped the chaplain in front of the cathedral. He asked:

“Would you hear my confession, Father?”

“I’d be happy to hear it,” came the reply.

With that, the sailor knelt down right on the sidewalk in front of the cathedral.

The chaplain said, **“Never mind kneeling. People will stare.”**

To which the sailor said:

“The heck with them, Father. Let ‘em stare. I’m proud of my faith.”

The sailor’s spirit of ‘witness’ was a bit overly enthusiastic, but he certainly had the idea.

In today’s 1st reading, Jesus tells his disciples:

“You will be witnesses for me...to the ends of the earth.”

Notice, his directive was **NOT** an invitation or a suggestion; it was a **declaration**:

“You will be witnesses for me....”

Jesus’ ‘**witness declaration**’ includes **ALL** of us. You see, by the nature our Baptism & Confirmation, we are all called to be **witnesses** of Jesus. This is why we renew our baptismal promises, annually, on Easter Sunday...to remind us that we are **to be** true followers in HIS footsteps.

In today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Mark, Jesus says:

“Proclaim the Good News to all creation.” Note Well: in this instance, it is a command! AND, by the way, proclaiming the good news is **not** reserved to priests & religious.

But, and there’s that proverbial **BUT** in life, again my friends.

How can the average person preach about Jesus in today’s world?

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

It’s really not as difficult as you might think. You are **not** expected to get your own soapbox, literally, thump the Bible, & preach on the street corner. Perhaps a few are called to do so. After all, there are many ‘gifts’ from the Holy Spirit.

However, the majority of us are called **to be** “who we are” as Christians and **Catholic** Christians in particular. It means we are to have **integrity**, that is, to be the best spouse that we can be, to be the best mom or dad that we can be, to be the best son/daughter that we can be, to be the best brother/sister we can be. It means to be the best employer/boss we can be, to be the best employee/teem member we can be. It is certainly **NOT** a perfect world, far from it! That’s why he expects us to be the best Catholic-Christians we can be—men & women of integrity. By being honest with people, by avoiding judging people, by being trustworthy people...**is** being a person with integrity. By going to Church regularly, by receiving the sacraments regularly, by being active in our church-community, by being patient, by being kind, by being **forgiving**...all are ways of following Him ...and doing so with integrity!

We might compare Ascension Thursday to (my old analogy) the passing on of the baton from one runner to another in a relay race. 2,000 years ago, on this day, Jesus passed the baton of continuing his work on earth to his followers.

The way we complete that work is by witnessing to our faith with integrity...in what we say and what we do, perhaps even as that sailor did in front of the cathedral or... in front of an abortion clinic occasionally.

*If we live as an 'integral Catholic,'
we will be living his command to love one another...
we will be proclaiming the Good News to every creature (at least, in our corner of the vineyard)!*

I close with this excerpt from our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.

***"You are like salt for all mankind.
BUT if salt loses its flavor,
there is no way to make it salty again.
It has become worthless,
so it is thrown out & people trample on it.***

***You are like a light for the whole world.
A city built on a hill cannot be hid...
In the same way, your light must shine before people,
so they will see the good things you do
and praise your Father in heaven." Mt.5:13-16***

*May almighty God, our Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*