

Church of the Assumption

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Lent 2010

Dear Parishioner,

I need your help. In fact, we need each other's help.

Our Sunday celebration of Mass is such a positive force in our lives. It helps us stay focused. It nourishes and deepens our faith. We are sacramentally joined to Jesus in the Eucharist, His personal gift to us. We praise God and we listen to His word. We encourage and support one another by our presence, prayer and participation. Our faith is reinforced with the wider view of the whole Church, not just our own limited insight. And yet ...

Some of our brothers and sisters are regularly missing from Church. They are wandering from the safety of the Good Shepherd's sheepfold. There is such a thing as becoming spiritually weak and starving to death too. We don't want this to happen to them.

We know God still loves them. And we know that people can pray effectively in other settings (home, car, school, work, hiking...). In fact, we all need to pray on our own ... often ... every day. But God has created us in such a way that we need each another. This is also true in living, and sharing, and celebrating our faith.

Our lives become very busy (jobs, school activities, meetings...). We easily forget how important God is for us, and how important we are as members of God's family (the Church. This 'busy-ness' in turn affects our children and their knowledge of God and faith. It's all the more risky when we "go it alone" without the support of our family of faith, the Church.

Nudged by God's Holy Spirit, we want to reach out to our brothers and sisters, encouraging them to "come home." We may not know why some are away, but we do know that they are missing something very important - their close connections with God's family and the sacraments.

Jesus did not force people to follow Him or to stay with Him. But Jesus did invite and urge people to accept God's loving mercy and to change their ways. We can do no less. We really care about our missing family members. Our own spiritual well-being requires us to reach out in concern for each other too.

What are we to do?

Pray! That's number one. In prayer we connect with God and let God into our minds and hearts; we allow God's Spirit to guide our thoughts and words and actions. We pray for our brothers and sisters as well as for ourselves.

Perk up! Enthusiasm is infectious. People can see the impact our faith makes in our attitude and disposition. Jesus is the fullness of God's unbounded, personal love for us. If we truly strive to be in tune with God and fill our hearts with kindness and mercy -- it shows. "A happy Christian is a good advertisement." We become light bulbs for others, welcoming beacons for those who are drifting. The more we take our faith to heart and live it joyfully (helping those in need ... forgiving offenses ... welcoming others ... looking for the good in each one ...), the better messengers we become.

Invite! We try to find helpful ways to encourage family, friends and neighbors to come home to the Church and to our Sunday Eucharist, without nagging. We certainly don't want to present ourselves as 'better than thou', since we know we are not perfect either. At the same time, we can't just sit back and do nothing. God would hold us responsible for such care-less-ness. We take folks where they are at ... but we don't just leave them there.

Think of one or two friends or neighbors who have been away from Mass. Invite them to **join you at Mass**. You might even offer to **pick them up** on your way ... or invite them to come with you for breakfast after Mass. You could **drop off a bulletin** and mention an insight you especially enjoyed this weekend (without giving a lecture). When you get involved in **some parish activity or dinner**, you might invite an inactive friend or relative to join you in that activity. For some, a 'side door' entrance like this is just what's needed to overcome the feelings of distance or indifference or shame or anger or embarrassment that may be keeping them from coming home.

We are eager for the spiritual good and happiness of all our brothers and sisters, as well as our own. We truly want to share this most precious gift God has given us for our salvation (Jesus -- and our faith in Him). We cannot do it alone. We need each other's help; this includes **you**. Will you reach out and help at least **one** person come home?

Enclosed is your schedule for Lent. Do what you can -- after asking God's guidance. With God's help we shall renew our own faith and help each other in the process.

Yours in Jesus' name,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rev. Donald F. Kramberg
Pastor

enc.

The Letter

Ruth went to her mail box and there was only one letter. She picked it up and looked at it before opening, but then she looked at the envelope again. There was no stamp, no postmark, only her name and address. She read the letter:

Dear Ruth:

I'm going to be in your neighborhood Saturday afternoon and I'd like to stop by for a visit.

Love Always,

Jesus

Her hands were shaking as she placed the letter on the table. "Why would the Lord want to visit me? I'm nobody special. I don't have anything to offer."

With that thought, Ruth remembered her empty kitchen cabinets. "Oh my goodness, I really don't have anything to offer. I'll have to run down to the store and buy something for dinner."

She reached for her purse and counted out its contents ... five dollars and forty cents. "Well, I can get some bread and cold cuts, at least."

She threw on her coat and hurried out the door.

A loaf of French bread, a half-pound of sliced turkey, and a carton of milk ... leaving Ruth with a grand total of twelve cents to last her until Monday. Nonetheless, she felt good as she headed home, her meager offerings tucked under her arm.

"Hey lady, can you help us, lady?"

Ruth had been so absorbed in her dinner plans, she hadn't even noticed two figures huddled in the alleyway -- a man and a woman, both of them dressed in little more than rags.

"Look lady, I ain't got a job, you know, and my wife and I have been living out here on the street, and, well, now it's getting cold and we're getting kinda hungry and, well, if you could help us, Lady, we'd really appreciate it."

Ruth looked at them both.

They were dirty, they smelled bad and frankly, she was certain that they could get some kind of work if they really wanted to.

"Sir, I'd like to help you, but I'm a poor woman myself. All I have is a few cold cuts and some bread, and I'm having an important guest for dinner tonight and I was planning on serving that to Him."

"Yeah, well, okay lady, I understand. Thanks anyway."

The man put his arm around the woman's shoulders, turned and headed back into the alley.

As she watched them leave, Ruth felt a familiar twinge in her heart.

"Sir, wait!"

The couple stopped and turned as she ran down the alley after them.

"Look, why don't you take this food. I'll figure out something else to serve my guest." She handed the man her grocery bag.

"Thank you, lady. Thank you very much!"

"Yes, thank you!" It was the man's wife, and Ruth could see now that she was shivering.

"You know, I've got another coat at home. Here, why don't you take this one." Ruth unbuttoned her jacket and slipped it over the woman's shoulders. Then smiling, she turned and walked back to the street...without her coat and with nothing to serve her guest.

"Thank you, lady! Thank you very much!"

Ruth was chilled by the time she reached her front door, and worried too. The Lord was coming to visit and she didn't have anything to offer Him.

She fumbled through her purse for the door key. But as she did, she noticed another envelope in her mailbox.

"That's odd. The mailman doesn't usually come twice in one day."

She took the envelope out of the box and opened it.

Dear Ruth:

It was so good to see you again.

Thank you for the lovely meal. And thank you, too, for the beautiful coat.

Love Always,

Jesus

The air was still cold, but even without her coat, Ruth no longer noticed.

Breakfast at McDonald's

I am a mother of three (ages 14, 12, 3) and have recently completed my college degree.

The last class I had to take was Sociology. The teacher was absolutely inspiring with the qualities that I wish every human being had been graced with. Her last project of the term was called "Smile." The class was asked to go out and smile at three people and document their reactions.

I am a very friendly person and always smile at everyone and say hello anyway, so, I thought this would be a piece of cake, literally.

Soon after we were assigned the project, my husband, youngest son, and I went out to McDonald's one crisp March morning. It was just our way of sharing special playtime with our son.

We were standing in line, waiting to be served, when all of a sudden everyone around us began to back away, and then even my husband did. I did not move an inch ... an overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside of me as I turned to see why they had moved.

As I turned around I smelled a horrible "dirty body" smell, and there standing behind me were two poor homeless men. As I looked down at the short gentleman, close to me, he was "smiling". His beautiful sky blue eyes were full of God's Light as he searched for acceptance. He said, "Good day" as he counted the few coins he had been clutching. The second man fumbled with his hands as he stood behind his friend. I realized the second man was mentally challenged and the blue-eyed gentleman was his salvation. I held my tears as I stood there with them.

The young lady at the counter asked him what they wanted. He said, "Coffee is all Miss" because that was all they could afford. (If they wanted to sit in the restaurant and warm up, they had to buy something. He just wanted to be warm).

Then I really felt it - the compulsion was so great I almost reached out and embraced the little man with the blue eyes. That is when I noticed all eyes in the restaurant were set on me, judging my every action.

I smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give me two more breakfast meals on a separate tray. I then walked around the corner to the table that the men had chosen as a resting spot. I put the tray on the table and laid my hand on the blue-eyed gentleman's cold hand.

He looked up at me, with tears in his eyes, and said, "Thank you." I leaned over, began to pat his hand and said, "I did not do this for you. God is here working through me to give you hope."

I started to cry as I walked away to join my husband and son. When I sat down my husband smiled at me and said, "That is why God gave you to me, Honey, to give me hope." We held hands for a moment and at that time, we knew that only because of the Grace that we had been given were we able to give.

We are not church goers, but we are believers. That day showed me the pure Light of God's sweet love.

I returned to college, on the last evening of class, with this story in hand. I turned in "my project" and the instructor read it. Then she looked up at me and said, "Can I share this?" I slowly nodded as she got the attention of the class.

She began to read and that is when I knew that we as human beings and being part of God share this need to heal people and to be healed.

In my own way I had touched the people at McDonald's, my husband, son, instructor, and every soul that shared the classroom on the last night I spent as a college student.

I graduated with one of the biggest lessons I would ever learn: UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE.