

An Invitation (October 28, 2018)

Did you hear what the disciples said? Did you hear what the disciples said to Bartimaeus? “Take courage,” they told him. “Take courage. Get up. Jesus is calling you.” “Take courage.” “Take courage.” Hmm...

So, have you looked at the calendar lately? We’re oh so rapidly approaching the end of another calendar year and the end of another liturgical year as well. Advent will be here in five short weeks. And then – before you know it – the Christmas season. It all goes by so quickly doesn’t it? Just five weeks to go before the end of another liturgical year.

As you know, we’ve tried to live out of grateful hearts over the course of the last 18 months or so. In doing so, we’ve employed the language of gifts and gratitude:

- In the Penitential Rite with which we begin Mass...
- In the petitions we share following our recitation of the Creed...
- And in the *Strengthfinders* initiative in which so many of us have discovered and embraced our God-given gifts and talents.

Yes, in so many ways, we’ve focused in an intentional way on gratitude over the course of the last 18 months.

Why this focus? Why, indeed! The short answer, of course, is the Eucharist, the source and summit of our faith. The very term “Eucharist” means thanksgiving. In the Eucharist, we’re invited to give thanks with Jesus. In the Eucharist, we’re invited by Jesus to live out of grateful hearts.

More specifically, we’ve continued to mine the wisdom of our Mission 150 experience, a true work of the Spirit in our time. A true work of the Spirit here at St. Mary’s... A true work of the Spirit here among us...

In our vision prayer, we describe ourselves as “faithful disciples of Jesus,” and we embrace our identity as “disciples on the journey.” Disciples... Faithful disciples... You and me, from the youngest among us to the oldest... From those of us whose families have been a part of St. Mary’s for generations and for those of us who are new to St. Mary’s as well.

And so now an invitation... Now, with five weeks remaining in the current liturgical year, an invitation to you and to your families... An invitation to move ever deeper into gratitude... An invitation to move every deeper into intentional discipleship...

A brochure was shared with you as you entered Church this morning. It’s entitled: “*Intentional Living: Is God Calling Me to More?*” It’s about “intentional discipleship.” Let’s take a look at this brochure for a moment if we could. It’s a tool really: an aid for an extended reflection on the meaning of intentional discipleship, an aid for an extended reflection on the meaning of intentional discipleship for you and for your families.

If you open the brochure to the inside you’ll see three panels, three panel that together address the “more” into which God may be inviting us. As noted in our Vision Prayer, we “live God’s mission through our ‘praying, our serving, and our sharing.’” The first panel focuses on praying, the second on sharing, and the third on serving.

- Next week, we'll focus on the first of these three dimensions of intentional discipleship: "intentional praying." We'll then invite you to reflect on your prayer life over the course of the week that follows. The key question? "Is God calling you to more in terms of prayer? Is God calling me to more? Is God calling us to more?" A bit of space is then provided at the bottom. At the end of the week - if you're so moved – you can note your commitments with respect to prayer for the coming year, the new liturgical year that will begin with the First Sunday of Advent.
- We'll then move to the middle panel on Sunday, November 11th. Again, a key question: "Is God calling you to more in terms of your sharing, your sharing here at St. Mary's, to be sure, but, more broadly, your sharing in your families, in your places of work, and in the broader community as well. Is God calling you to more?"
- On November 18th, we'll move to the third panel: intentional serving. Again, a key question: "Is God calling you to more? Is God calling us to more in terms of our serving?" And again, space is provided for any commitments we may choose to make.

Praying, serving, and sharing... The three ways, in fact, in which we live as "faithful disciples of Jesus..." Praying, serving, and sharing... This is how we "journey to God." November 4th, November 11th, and November 18th... Reflections on our praying, our serving, and our sharing... Reflections on what it means to live out of grateful hearts... Reflections on what it means to live as intentional disciples... An invitation...

But then what? Well, there is a bit more, just a bit. Thanksgiving comes early this year: November 22nd, in fact. It's a day in which we traditionally thank God for all that is good in our lives, in our nation, and in the world. It's a day in which we're invited – in a special way – to live out of grateful hearts.

As was shared last week, we'll host a Thanksgiving meal this year here at St. Mary's. No one should be alone on Thanksgiving Day, and the celebration of Thanksgiving shouldn't be a burden. Given this, we're inviting all who would otherwise be alone on Thanksgiving Day and all for whom the preparation of a traditional Thanksgiving meal would pose a burden to join us here at St. Mary's, where together we'll thank God for his many blessings. Our hope is that this gathering will be a tangible and lasting sign here at St. Mary's, a tangible and lasting sign of our praying, our serving, and our sharing as faithful disciples of Jesus.

And then November 25th, the Solemnity of Christ the King, the last Sunday in our current liturgical year... Our hope is that you'll bring your annotated brochures with you to Mass on November 25th. Our commitments will then be collected and carried to the altar along with our gifts of bread and wine as part of our offertory procession.

No names... No identification as such... Instead, the anonymous commitments of faithful and intentional disciples for a new liturgical year... It's at the altar, of course, that our commitments – your gifts and mine – will be made holy as they're gathered with the very body and blood of Jesus. The Eucharist... Our true thanksgiving celebration...

And so an invitation to an extended and ever deeper reflection on discipleship... An invitation to live more deeply and more intentionally out of grateful hearts, grateful hearts formed through praying, serving, and sharing.

From whom is this invitation being extended? Father Pat, of course... And certainly our Pastoral Council... In fact, however, the invitation to intentional discipleship lived through praying, serving, and sharing is extended to each of us by Jesus.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus encounters Bartimaeus, a blind man. Bartimaeus' needs are simple; he just wants "to see." Much like us, Bartimaeus wants "to see." Jesus summons Bartimaeus, and, in doing so, he invites Bartimaeus into a relationship that will change the course of his life.

"Take courage," Jesus' disciples tell Bartimaeus. "Get up, Jesus is calling you."

Faithful discipleship... Intentional discipleship... "Take courage. Get up. Jesus is calling you."