
From: Office for Evangelization and Parish Life
Sent: Tuesday, February 4, 2020 9:55 AM
To: seasred@outlook.com
Subject: The Question - a scary starting place this Lent



Dear Natalie,

If not me, then who will proclaim the Gospel? If not now, when will the Gospel be proclaimed? If not the truth of the Gospel, then what do I proclaim?

Scary questions might be particularly relevant for Lent 2020. And didn't Jesus have a knack for asking scary new questions? Today, he might put one this way: What if there is nothing wrong with "them"? You know "them" - all those families who no longer come to church. It used to be that those who had God at the center of their lives, automatically came to church. Today, churches are realizing that God has some that churches do not. Nevertheless, parish vitality still relies on families.

Families have been the most powerful discipling organisms throughout history. But we can no longer presume that these families see us as a spiritual resource in their brave new world. A church that is doing nice things is not enough. Parents want the best for their children, and that is Jesus. Do we help these families to know, love and serve God, in their lives? And, how are we different from the dozens of competing congregations which also claim to do this? Neither the grandeur of worship space, the winning personality of a leader, the popularity of programs, or clever use of technologies, are enough if our mission is not about making disciples for Christ.

According to the latest research, the fullness of truth, and access to sacraments, is not selling like it used to. What IS selling is a fervent and personal faith in Jesus, which is joyfully shared with others. Congregations that rely upon their positions on hot button issues, or cater to consumer appetites will fail with the next generation. Yes, some churches still rely on gimmicks to sustain attendance, perhaps with the honest hope that curiosity will lead to a holy longing, and cause vibrant faith. Only two problems with this theory: neither the current realities, nor the witness of the first Christians, support such

an aspiration. The early church was driven by an urgency to foster in all people, a life in Christ. That is still what is needed today.

Every church should ask themselves - why are we here? Why do people come here and not drive a mile down to a more convenient Mass? What difference would it make if our church closed their doors on Sunday after the last worship service? How long would it take people to notice? What impact would it have on the community? Would people simply read the "Closed" sign on the door next weekend, and get back in their cars to find another nearby church? Is there a unique reason for our presence beyond weekly worship convenience, or some tribal affiliation? Does our parish command any particular loyalty, and is that loyalty Jesus centered? Answers to all of these questions can be found in conversation with our people.

It may be a scary new starting place. But, why not do what Jesus did? Ask the scary question that is already in everyone's mind. Your parish vitality might depend on it.

What else can you do in Lent? Try these **Lenten Recommendations** or for **Missionary Disciples** or an ecumenical resource - **Build Faith**, for even more ideas.

P.S. If you want to do something sustaining in your parish just call us. You might also **Download** this course description for ideas, topics and skills which can be presented to your parish in any way that you desire. The cost is the best part... It is FREE! Interested? Contact **Dennis Mahaney** at [716-847-8393](tel:716-847-8393).



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