

A Homily with a couple invitations and some important and timely information:

When John the Baptist pointed out, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" he is pointing him out to not just the other disciples at that time. He does it each time we come to the Eucharistic Table. "Behold the Lamb of God." Andrew heard the identifying statement from the Baptist and he began to literally follow Jesus. "What are you looking for?", Jesus said. "Where are you staying?", said Andrew. "Come and see."

Come and see-----come and see. Jesus is saying the same thing to you and I.

Today, some 2000 years later, people are coming to see all the time. But maybe the question from Jesus that begins the whole encounter is where we need to begin. "What are you looking for?" I ask it of myself, I hear Jesus asking it of me. "What are you looking for?" What are you looking for out of life and have you found it. Are you honestly completely happy? Or is there something scratching inside that says I am still looking and I don't know what I am looking for. God knows what we are looking for. And He is willing to share it with us...but we have to get off our couches and come and see.

I'd like to speak to the men of this parish in particular. Men, the Lord is calling you to pick up your role as leaders in this community and in your families. You carry a special responsibility in the life of your family, to be a leader in the faith. Your direction is what is needed by your wife and your children. Your example is vital to the salvation of the members of your family. When you got married you promised to raise your children according to the law of Christ and His Church. This means you cannot let your faith remain as it was when you got married or worse yet, let it smolder in the ashes of High School and College and Work. You have grown, your faith must grow too. I am inviting and challenging you to blow off the ashes of years of lukewarm faith and let the hot embers of Christ's gift of Faith come to life. Come and see! That's what Jesus told Andrew, and he came, and it made all the difference. He wanted his brother Simon to come and join him.

**That Man Is You** is a most appropriate way for you to blow the ashes off your faith coals. The Lord wants you to be hot or cold but lukewarm is what he will spit out of his mouth. To be a man of prayer, to be a man of sound morals, to be a man who resists the lusts of the world: for money, for pleasure, for artificial highs—this is what it means to be renewed, casting aside the lukewarm, get-by, faith practice. Sign-ups are going on today for That Man Is You. I have told the men who have started That Man Is You in our parish that they must invite personally their neighbors and friends to come and be part of this awesome program. Andrew got fired up because he got close to the Lord. Andrew drew his brother, Simon into the program. And Simon became Peter, the leader of our Church in its earliest days. That Man Is You enables you to connect with the grace that God has in store for you. Each of you have been given so much responsibility. To raise a son or daughter, to make a living, to love a wife, and to do it all with God's Love at your core---God has you in mind today...when Jesus says, "Come and see." Check it out. Sign up.

The **Knights of Columbus** is another way to plant your foot directly on the path to follow Jesus more closely. To be a member of this organization is to take seriously your faith journey. To learn more about your faith, to faithfully practice it, to learn of the Lord's forgiveness in your life, to become a leader. The KC's do not just fry fish..they also go on retreat...as we did last weekend, an excellent retreat out at Griswold IA. They also serve the needy and the pro-life cause. They do what Andrew did, they came and saw and it has made a world of difference. The KC's are the largest Men's organization in the Roman Catholic Church. Founded as a benefit society, today it challenges men to get in touch with the movements in our culture that are detrimental to family life and to the morals of our youth. To help do this, recently the KC's founded a Squires Circle which forms boys into enthusiastic followers of Christ. The KC's also respond to the culture and government that is taking our freedom of conscience away. They learn and they act. They are together a political force for good. The KCs also Come and See...and lodging with Jesus...they are changed into better men, better husbands and better father.

Finally, the Men's Club, which is probably as old as the parish continues as a great service group for Men supporting the various activities of our school. There are many programs, organizations and committees in our parish for men and women that help us all to blow off the ashes from the coal of our faith life. **Lord Teach us to Pray** and **Women of Grace** to name two more that include women in the mix. And then we have the newly formed and growing **Women's Group**. We all have a role to play that is vital and unique. But if we do not Come and See, we will stay at best lukewarm and we might risk not being the most authentic replicas of Christ we are called to be—and so find ourselves waiting in purgatory for a longer period simply because we did not take up every opportunity to learn, follow, and let ourselves be transformed.

If you have been reading the bulletin you will notice that I have been writing about our upcoming 40 hours in our parish. 40 Hours was something that was held regularly in parishes yearly but for years it has gathered dust. It was never discontinued, it just went unused. I am inviting St. Gerald to enter into a conscious time of serious and prayerful preparation for our 40 Hours this coming March 11-13. We are not going to have a Mission this year. One did not get scheduled because I did not realize I needed to do that when I arrived here 18 months ago. We have one scheduled for Lent in 2013. 40 Hours will, I hope become an annual retreat for our parish along with the Parish Mission.

What is 40 Hours? It is a period of prayer that lasts approximately 40 hours. The Blessed Sacrament will be Exposed in the Monstrance on our Altar here in this Church from after the noon mass on Sunday until the closing service Tuesday evening. There will be three services: Sunday, Monday and Tuesday evenings at 7:00 pm. We will have a guest homilist for each of these services. And we will also encourage parishioners to come for an hour of prayer here in Church sometime during the 40 hours. The Sunday noon mass begins our 40 Hours of Exposition and it leads us to the Mass which closes our 40 Hours on Tuesday night. The core purpose of doing this is to encourage you to take time to pray before Jesus who is present in such an awesome and wonderful way in our Eucharist. It slows the mass down so we can listen to him speak to us just like he did on the road to Emmaus when, in His Risen form, He was not recognized by his

disciples, but their eyes were opened and they saw who He was in the breaking of the Bread.

I am so excited to bring this wonderful service and experience to you here at St. Gerald. It will be a great moment of grace for our parish. But we need to pray for its success and for open hearts to accept the grace God wants to give to each of us. Each First Friday our Grade School students spend 20 or 30 minutes with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar at Lakeview...the closing service is truly a reverent and holy prayer time. On two occasions already this year our Religious Education students gathered for a Benediction service with the Blessed Sacrament on Wednesday evenings...and they too got to sense the presence of God most high with them, touching their hurts and raising their spirits. I want the whole parish to feel God's presence and to know he is waiting for you to come and sit in his presence and listen to him. There are prayer cards in the narthex and at the Chapel entryway...if you will pray for the success of this great event...than please take one.

After 18 months as your pastor I have seen and experienced quite a bit of your spiritual life, community life, and your practices and customs. I felt your concern for welcome, for a feeling of being at home here in St. Gerald. I felt your efforts to take care of the less fortunate: numerous outreach efforts and not just at Christmas time. I know of your support for our school and I am pleased with the efforts in our Religious Education program to create an environment of welcome and faith growth for the children and for the parents. The Confirmation Program, the Youth and Young Adult programs, the Faith Formation programs for adults—like RCIA...all are excellent ongoing efforts. And the core of our life as a parish, our liturgy is well organized, prayerful and participative.

Recently, as you know, we took up a survey of the sentiments of our parishioners on various subjects. Results of the survey are published on-line our website. This, along with input from the various leadership committees and staff, has enabled the long-range planning committee to formulate some goals that will focus us over the next 5 years or so. To be a Welcoming Parish, to be an Evangelizing Parish, to be a Parish that is marked by healthy communication, and to be a viable

and sustainable Parish....these are turning out to be some of the words that will mark our goals. These goals will find their way into our mainstream in lots of new ways. Stay tuned.

The Meitler Study of our parishes and schools is about half way finished. Our School was included and has participated in the study. Without a doubt there will be changes in the upcoming years. Even though our school is basically full, we can no longer afford to run schools with low classroom numbers. We have to join together to guarantee that quality Catholic Education is affordable and is run as efficiently as possible. The model of a parish running its own school will experience the greatest change. I believe we are moving towards a system that will join our strengths together and allow us to have full school and full classrooms. This change will take the pressure off of pastors to run their school, deal with personnel issues, and raise so much money to run the school that he can no longer afford to offer services the rest of the parish needs. Until these changes are solidified and a plan gets more specific....and the Archbishop accepts this plan...we have a building to take care of and students to teach.

I want to introduce to you now a concern that is becoming more critical and that we need to do something about immediately. That last goal about being a viable and sustainable parish will need more study: it will entail looking at our facilities to see what needs to be done and researching more closely the Pre-School idea for our parish. Any structure that has gotten the use we have put our Lakeview buildings through, for 50+ years, cries out for an upgrade.

- 1) In order for us to really plan well and get the best bang out of our buck for our facilities we need to have some professional help to do the research, investigation and planning...so that we don't just put bandaids on things and hope it will work but that what we do will be the best long term decision taking into account our financial abilities. I want to hire an architectural firm to study the Heating, Air Conditioning, plumbing and electrical issues in our 50 plus year old buildings at Lakeview. Leaking roofs, past roof designs and decisions that are not proving adequate, upgrading

our facility to meet the needs of the next generation of education...all this needs to have a master plan that is well thought out.

- 2) We need to fix some roofing now. Having a plastic tarp that forms a bladder to catch the leaking from the roof and then funneling it through a garden hose into a 40 gallon garbage barrel is not a good fix. I hate to think of the rotting roofing membranes and other issues we are just bandaiding. This fix is not cheap.
- 3) We need to wipe out at least 50 % of our present debt. This debt is leftover from the last building project to add on the Middle School. We have a little over \$200,000 still on loan. In addition, as you perhaps know from my bulletin articles, we have a growing deficit for this fiscal year due to necessary expenses like textbooks, parking lot repairs and some personnel costs. Not to mention the decreased income from celebrating Christmas and New Years on Sundays. In fact, the collections over the Christmas Holidays will not equal what was brought in two years ago when the Blizzard wiped our Christmas.
- 4) We need to do some improvements in our School. In particular: we are going to renovate the stage so that it can serve as a music room. With a new and excellent full-time music teacher and the ensuing enthusiasm for the program...we need a place for that program to call home. This renovation will use this little used space and still preserve it as a stage when plays are performed. This will free up the conference room for parish use once again.
- 5) Technology needs in the whole parish plant are just barely making it. The sound system in the gym needs replacement-this would benefit both our School and Religious Ed. programs, the phone system at all of Lakeview is antiquated, the Smartboard technology that is becoming common place in other schools needs a shot in the arm in our school.
- 6) Finally, I would like to begin a sinking fund for our parish. Call it a rainy day fund. But if we did not have to worry about making payments on the debt..we could budget for a regular percentage to go each month into the sinking fund. We would have the emergency fund available when the need

arises. Your help to get this started would be good stewardship of our resources.

Our parish raised almost \$100,000 for the Annual Archbishop's Appeal. If we can do that then we ought to be able to raise the kind of money these items will cost...We will do more research and more sharing of information with you. But I wanted to let you know what was coming. Our plan is to do this one-year campaign beginning sometime in Lent and conclude it shortly after Easter. This appeal will last one year. Each and every parishioner will be invited to participate. And gifts can be given in any way you wish, but we need to have a pledge from you so we can project **what** we can accomplish and **when**.

Come and see, that's what Jesus said to me. In fact I remember fondly a directed retreat the Fr. Bernard Strasser gave to me back when I was in college....Come and See was the theme. Well after 18 months here I am still looking and I am seeing some of the things the Lord is calling us to. Like Andrew, I am calling you to come and be part of the ongoing life of our parish, I am calling you to participate in the various renewal programs in our parish, I am calling you to pray for the success of and participate in the upcoming 40 hours Eucharistic Retreat. And I am calling you to help put some things in our building plant in better order. Thank you.