

I finished a book this week entitled, Walking the Road to God, by Fr. Lawrence Carney. Fr. Carney is the chaplain to a monastery of Benedictine nuns in the small city of St. Joseph, Missouri. In the book Fr. Carney describes how he spends hours walking the streets of St. Joseph dressed in a long, black cassock, and an old fashioned, round-brimmed priest-hat called a “Saturno.” He carries a large crucifix in one hand and a rosary in the other. He prays the rosary as he walks.

Fr. Carney sees this as a ministry. The book is an account of the people he meets and conversations he has with them. He doesn't really approach them. They approach him. Obviously, in his clothes he is a bit of a curiosity. His strategy is that he figures people will think he's weird the first time they see him. But if he walks the streets of St. Joseph enough by the third or fourth time they encounter what becomes known in town as “the walking Priest” they might approach him.

It works. and that gives him a chance to simply talk to people who have never talked to a priest before – or maybe they left the Church

long ago. Fr. Carney thinks many evangelization strategies push too hard. On the religious scale where an atheist would be a one and Mother Teresa a ten, many people are, say, a three. Fr. Carney says we church-people too often try to get a three to become a seven in one step. His idea is just to talk and listen. The goal is just to get the 3 to become a 3.1. But if this happens enough real change can take place.

The book made me think, “Is this something I could, or should, do?” And that question leads back to today’s parable in the gospel. In the Parable of the Talents things don’t turn out well for the third servant. Why not? We should see the talent the Master gives, not as a large sum of money, of course, but as the spiritual gifts and graces God gives us. We don’t all get the same gifts – and God doesn’t expect all of us to do the same thing with our gifts. After all, the Master is happy with both the first and second servant who achieve different results. But what He does expect, according to the parable, are two things. God expects that we will risk for Him, and that we will not hide His gifts.

That's what the third servant gets wrong by hiding the talent in the earth and not putting it into a bank, which was certainly risky.

Remember, ancient banks didn't have FDIC insurance. If the bank went belly-up, which happened fairly often, you lost your money.

That's what struck me about Fr. Carney's ministry of walking the streets as a priest. It's risky – not that anybody beats him up or anything. But it did open him up to comments, stares, unfriendly questions. And it was risky precisely because he wasn't hiding or burying his faith. That cassock, crucifix, and rosary made it pretty clear to the most casual observer who he was, and what he believed.

Fr. Carney's book made me ask myself this week if I was hiding my faith, if I was risking anything for the faith in Kirkland. I've been thinking about this. We as a parish we're pretty good about forming the faith of those who are already practicing Catholics. But we have a lot of work to do in reaching out to the rest of the city.

A Catholic pastor, according to canon law, is Pastor not only of the Catholics who go to church, or even of all the people who call themselves Catholic in town. He's Pastor of every person within his parish boundaries, even if they hate the Church, or couldn't care less. What do I do to reach out to that part of my flock? I spend most of my time among Catholics. When do non-Catholics see me? What do I risk? Am I burying my faith?

So, I've decided that I will begin to walk the streets of Kirkland. I don't think I'll wear a cassock or carry the crucifix – at least not at the start. But I'll wear my black clerical clothes and carry my rosary and pray for those I see in town as I walk the streets. That will accomplish two things. First, I'll be praying for all my parishioners, not just those who come to church. But I will also let people see me. I don't think I will have many encounters at first. Fr. Carney didn't. It took a while before people saw him three or four or more times and got used to him. But if I walk long enough with a smile and a simple, non-creepy, greeting for

people, if I'm not in a hurry, I suspect people will eventually make contact. I have to be honest – I probably won't be walking in the rain or snow. But I hope at least once a week I can go for my ministry walk around Kirkland. I'll try it for a year and then evaluate my experience.

What about you? Last week we had a meeting for the new St. Paul Street Evangelization group. These are people who want to spend a day a month at a table somewhere on the sidewalks of Kirkland with a sign identifying them as Catholics who are open to a conversation. An orientation meeting will be on Sat, Dec 2 after morning mass. That may or may not be for you. But you have been given gifts and graces by God. How do you share those? Is there any way that you risk your psychological comfort for Christ? Is it fair to say that your faith is hidden to those outside your immediate circle? Have you buried your Master's gifts in a hole? Think about those things so as not to become like the third servant. Our faith grows, doubles even, when we risk it and put it out there in the open. How do you plan on doing that?