

When I became a priest I ended up doing many things I never thought I wanted to do – visited gang members in a maximum security prison, spend time with parents who had just lost a child. More prosaic, but also originally unwanted, was an experience I preached about a few years ago. When I was in sixth grade I was the supposed star of a short Arbor Day play at my school. I forgot all my lines in front of the whole school! So when I came to Holy Family I was told that my predecessor had taken a small role each year in the play. My post traumatic anxiety skyrocketed. But I decided to do it. I would go back on stage! For the past ten years I have been in every play, more or less successfully. It's been what the self-help books call a "growth experience."

I think of that in relation to the parable of the Sower and the Seed where Jesus compares Christian Discipleship and the Kingdom of God to a growing, fruit-producing plant. That's crucial. We should think of our spiritual life in organic ways – something that is supposed to grow and change. That's at the heart of our own Parish Prayer. We introduced

that prayer on Pentecost. We'll pray it again today as we do at every mass. We ask God, "to help each of us take our next step in following Jesus, and to help us live and share the joy of the gospel with others."

This weekend is our Talent Fair. We're offering a chance for everyone to serve and grow – to take their next step in following Jesus. Jesus has asked me to do a lot of challenging things. Maybe God is asking you to do something for Him that you didn't know you wanted to do! Over in the social hall after mass all the ministries and groups of the parish have tables set up to help you learn and choose the ways God is calling you to serve the parish, the larger community, and Him.

In doing that I want you to consider the Weekend Experience. Christian Discipleship is rooted in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. That's the one time we are all supposed to be at Holy Family each week. If that experience isn't opening us up to the grace of Jesus then this parish is failing in its mission. I believe that, in addition to

whatever else you might do, every parishioner should volunteer in some way that contributes to the Weekend Experience.

We need a lot of volunteers to make the Weekend Experience fruitful. We have a desperate need for more Eucharistic Ministers, lectors, ushers, mass facilitators. For instance, at the 11:00 mass we have around 600 people attend but only four ushers – four! And Saturday night is not much better. The Eucharistic Ministers at some masses are serving every week because we have so few volunteers.

But the Weekend Experience extends before and after mass. Volunteering at the Café could be your weekend experience job. We are also beginning a before-mass welcoming ministry. There are the choirs and bells, doing the flowers, cleaning altar linens, etc. All those ministries help make coming to mass at Holy Family a better place to encounter God. Every week there are many non-Catholics who step through our doors. You may not think of yourself as an evangelist, but

Jesus does. As part of our baptismal call He asks us to help new people have a positive encounter with the Church this weekend.

But the weekend Eucharist, while it's the most important time of the week for Catholics, it isn't the only way we live out our Discipleship. If the only thing we do that marks us as Catholics is come to mass once a week, then we won't grow in faith and closeness to God. And remember Jesus' parable – we are supposed to be growing! That growth happens when we take the grace of the Eucharist and then go share it with others in charity and faith. Remember our prayer – “help us to live and share the joy of the gospel with others.” So, in addition to the Weekend Experience positions, every parishioner should also be involved in at least one of these opportunities to serve.

At Holy Family we have so many ways to do that. There are the Pastoral Care ministries, the Faith Formation ministries, the Social Justice ministries. And, while people don't always think of administration in terms of service, the parish would struggle without

volunteers for the Grounds up-keep, parish office assistance, the stewardship and newcomer's committees. I could go on. I haven't named all the groups, so everyone go over after mass and explore for yourself. How might God be asking you to grow?

As I said, I've spent the last ten years appearing in the parish school play. I've grown, but ten years is enough. I've decided to retire again from the stage. I mention that because that's true for many things we do for Christ. They're not forever. Volunteering for a ministry doesn't mean you can never leave it. Signing up for something today isn't a life sentence. It's a chance to grow and serve.

When people come to me and say they're stuck spiritually I ask them, are they praying every day? Are they receiving the sacraments regularly, working on the virtues? Are they seeking to grow in their knowledge of God through Scripture and study? But a key part of growing in Christ is taking the risk to get outside of oneself. Am I

sacrificing anything, any time or effort, for Christ and other people? If not, my heart may be too hard for the seed of grace to grow there.

Jesus, the great Sower of the seed, has offered each of us a chance to grow and become fruitful in Him. Don't avoid Him and His offer to soften your heart through service to others who need you.

Please go over to the Social Hall after mass and pray about what new step in the spiritual life Jesus is asking you to take.