

I want to begin by letting you know some of the results of the parish survey you took a couple of months ago. The complete results are online on our homepage, but the basic news is good. The percentage of those parishioners who are engaged rose 8% and those actively disengaged dropped 3%. And there was an average increase on all questions of about .1 on a five-point scale – which is good. But today I want to preach about the worst number we received. This was on the question about whether you had been **asked about progress in your spiritual life in the last three months by someone in the parish.**

That question is one I want to concentrate on because it indicates a hole in our parish community's culture. I say that because the purpose of this parish is to help all of us gain and deepen a relationship with Jesus – and engaging in conversations about that goal really helps a person do that. The Founder of the Apostles of the Interior Life, Fr. Salvatore Scorza, has a line he always uses when he meets a person. Right off the bat he asks, "How's your holiness going?" He doesn't care

how well he knows them, or if they are even believers. He figures that question will help him get to know anyone.

Fr. Salvatore asks that question of everybody, including complete strangers. I'm not asking that of you. But I do think we need to become a community where hearing and answering that kind of question about one's progress in the spiritual life is a normal thing.

Today, besides being Mother's Day (blessings Moms!), is also Good Shepherd Sunday. In our Gospel we heard Jesus say to His listeners, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me." Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep and wants to guide them to eternal life. That's us! We're supposed to listen for the Good Shepherd's voice so we can follow Him. And that knowledge of what Jesus is trying to tell us often comes through other people, especially faithful Disciples who are interested in our lives.

Priests and seminarians have Spiritual directors, usually priests, to whom they go each month and talk about the spiritual matters and

questions of their lives. There aren't enough priests to go around. But spiritual lay people can also fulfil this role. So – who is going to ask you, “How's your holiness going?” And to whom will you ask that question?

I have three ideas of how to get there. First, some of you are already involved in small groups of some kind here in the parish. Maybe it's a Connect Group, a book club, etc. But if you don't already take time to ask and answer that question about your spiritual lives, why not start? Evangelization is the priority of our parish – and some of that involves interacting with people we don't know – which is hard. But this is different. I'm talking about going a step deeper with people you are already connected with in the parish. Why shouldn't the question about how our spiritual lives are going be part of our conversations?

The second option for those without such a small group, is to form your own group from three or four people you know from the parish. Maybe you already meet and talk socially. But why not add this question to your get-togethers: “How's your spiritual life going?” Agree

with one another to be intentional about it. Remember, I'm talking about people who are already your friends. All you need to do is to go one step deeper and bring God into your talk more deliberately.

Third option: think of a person you know here at Holy Family whose spiritual life you admire – and ask them to go out for coffee or something. And then ask them if you could meet periodically to talk about some spiritual questions you have. To call this spiritual direction may sound too grand, but it can serve that purpose if you both let it.

In suggesting these options, I don't underestimate the challenge. It's a form of vulnerability to reveal your soul, even a little, to others. But the image Jesus uses of the Good Shepherd who is known by, and knows, each of His sheep suggests that there's meant to be a close, intimate bond between each of us and Jesus. But the sheep can't follow the shepherd if they don't recognize His voice.

A personal conversation about one's spiritual journey helps us do that in several ways. It helps us clarify our own thoughts. It can hold us

accountable for the resolutions and decisions we have previously made. It can also bring us insights and knowledge from another person's own spiritual journey.

Our reading from the Book of Revelation describes the communion of saints in heaven, dressed in their white robes. We're meant to be in that company and number. That's what Jesus wants for each of us. It's why He created us. But is that what we want for one another? Is it something we're willing to help one another with? The proof of that lies partly in whether we are willing to accompany one another on the journey.

I want this to be a parish where we all hear that phrase, "How's your holiness going?" (or something similar), so often that it became funny, and then normal. Have you talked to someone in the last three months about your spiritual growth? But also ask yourself, "In the last three months have I asked someone in my parish about their spiritual

growth?" We don't become saints on our own. Sheep live in flocks. We all need mentors. Who's yours? Are you willing to talk about it?