

As many of you know, I left the Catholic Church and Christianity when I went off to college. Before I eventually ended up an atheist, I investigated the eastern religions, including Zen Buddhism and Taoism. I want to begin this homily by looking at my motivations for this search. I was only 18-19 years old at the time, so there was a lot of immaturity, even absurdity in my vision, but it was heart-felt.

Throughout my freshman and sophomore years of college I had this feeling I needed to find . . . what? The meaning of the universe, enlightenment, the purpose of life, what Christ called “the one thing necessary,” (only I wasn’t looking to Jesus at that point). There were silly parts to this. Besides the Zen meditation I tried in my fraternity room (imagine the spiritual depth of that!), I had watched too much Kung Fu and thought part of the answer would be steeping myself in eastern martial arts. I briefly entered a Chinese language class, and even began learning how to survive in the wilderness on my own, eating roots and berries, etc. My basic goal was to become wiseman (a

pompous idea, I suppose), which I imagined would mean being like some eastern sage, a hermit wandering the woods, thinking deep thoughts, who had learned the secret of life . . . or something. But that was my vague goal.

As I said, there was a silly side to this. I didn't even really like camping. I wasn't that good at my judo class in PE. I dropped the Mandarin class after one day. But there was also something valuable about this part in my life that I want to stress today. And that is I was acting on what I now know is the universal call to holiness.

I had left Christianity because I assumed it didn't have the answers I was looking for – not really even knowing the faith at all. But I wasn't wrong in launching my search. That search is the purpose of our lives on earth and I still believe in the search – and I believe in the possibility of finding the answer – and so does Jesus, for every person, for you. We are all called to this union with God.

“Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, saying, “A sower went out to sow.” I picture this farmer just throwing the seed around. It’s going everywhere -- on the path, on the rocks, in the bushes, it’s everywhere. You might think this is wasteful. But the Sower is God and God is generous with everyone, everywhere, beyond our human calculation. He offers Himself to all.

This is what the Church means when she teaches the universal call to holiness. We can unconsciously assume that holiness is only for the elite or special people – not me – or you. I think that misunderstanding was in my head when I equated enlightenment and wisdom with this vague wiseman of the desert I was trying to become as a college student. But everyone is called to become a saint and few of us are called to be hermits in the woods.

We're meant by God to become one with Him right where we are. We must not assume that the different kinds of soil Jesus mentions in the parable stand for different people, so much as they describe each of us in the different spiritual states we experience as we go through life. We're all potentially that good soil that will yield a hundredfold. We're each called to the search.

That is why so much of my pastorate has been spent in trying to bring you opportunities to encounter Jesus. And today I want to offer another one. We're in strange times, but the search for God and holiness goes on even, especially, in a pandemic.

Starting this September, we're going to be forming Sacred Story Communities at Holy Family. Back in 2012 Fr. Bill Watson used Holy Family as a test site for developing his 40 Weeks individual prayer formation class. In 40 Weeks the first 12 weeks is a systematic review of each participant's whole life, identifying the areas needing healing, and ending in a whole life confession. Part two is a gradual introduction to

the Sacred Story method, building a practice week-by-week that will continue through life and deepen one's relationship with Jesus. Part three is meant to be a time to wake up to the spiritual world and our own spiritual nature so as to serve in Christ's work.

Fr. Watson is now forming on-going, small communities of 10-15 men or women. They will all go through the 40 Weeks formation, then continue to meet together each week for an hour, commit to a weekly rosary, 15 minutes for a daily Examen prayer, and a monthly confession. (For now, it looks like the meetings will be on-line).

We hope to form four groups in our parish, two of men and two of women – with one each of men and one of women being made up of young adults 19-35. You will be hearing more about this project this month. Space is limited. I will choose up to 60 candidates from those expressing interest by August 15. If you are interested, send in your name to info@hfkparish.org.

The purpose of the Sacred Story Communities is to teach spiritual discipline for long-term growth. Small communities of fellow Catholics dedicated to a common prayer and meeting regularly to share faith are crucial to letting the seed God plants in us at our baptism grow. If we want to bear fruit and grow in the Holy Spirit, we need something like this in our lives. The Sacred Story Community is a big commitment, but is the Holy Spirit is calling you to make it?

The Sower is still sowing extravagantly. I don't know if the Sacred Story Community is for you. But I do know that you're called to the search. You are included in the universal call to radical holiness and the adventure of finding God. Like me, forty years ago, perhaps you have been doing this on your own in unfocused or confused ways. But the search is real, God is real, and we are called to Him. Seek Him with all your life.