

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time(C)  
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes  
July 2, 3, 2016

*“For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation.”* Rarely have I started a homily with words from the second Scripture reading. But today's words of St. Paul to the Galatians are striking. We may endure much suffering. We may even, as St. Paul states, bear the marks of our own personal crosses, (sadness, grief, age marks beyond our years, graying hair or even no hair). But if through these marks and experiences we have become a new creation, then all is well! On the other hand, if we are not a new creation, then all is certainly not well!

When Archbishop Jackels visited with groups of people last summer and fall about the four priorities of his ministry here as bishop, he mentioned 'attending Holy Mass on the weekend' as one of them. And in speaking of this, he was clear that Holy Mass on the weekend is to be transformative. We are to be transformed into new creations. He said, “The Sunday liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.” It is not simply in the 'attending' that we are transformed into the true Christian spirit'. Rather we are transformed into new creations by what happens in the Sunday liturgy; by what we do and by what we are given, .... offer ourselves and then become the Body and Blood of Jesus.” Then he went on a bit. He said that the 'second most important part of the Mass is the Dismissal Rite ..... when the priest sends us forth 'to love and serve the Lord'. Having been transformed ourselves by the Mass, we are sent out into the world to transform it. “Go, you are sent.” And we are sent for a purpose .... to change the world. Jesus said during the Sermon on the Mount, “You are the light of the world”, and “You are the salt of the earth.” We are sent to make a difference in the world.

Today's gospel text begins with a similar sending out into the world. *“ At that time the Lord appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. ”* It was a common practice at that time to send messengers ahead to alert the people and prepare a fitting welcome for the important person who would arrive soon. After the resurrection and the return of Jesus to His Father in heaven, these pairs of disciples/messengers became “Jesus” in every town and place they visited. They carried the story of the life, death, resurrection and ascension as well as the rituals of baptism, table fellowship, and healing that continued Jesus' revelation of God's purposes for creation. The mission had been handed on from Jesus to the disciples. God is the sender of Jesus; Jesus is the sender of the disciples; the disciples eventually become the senders of others. Anything that survives in time does so because of multiple handoffs, commissionings from one generation of people to another. Jesus participated in this 'handing-off', this 'commissioning' by sending his disciples out to others. And this is exactly what Archbishop Jackels meant when speaking of Holy Mass. We are transformed during the Mass and then 'sent out' to take this to others, to

take this to the world. The disciples of Jesus did this, and the gospel continues on saying, *“The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name.’”*

As I thought about this during the past week, two 'what if' ideas came to me.

What if ..... today we all left after Mass in pairs just as Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs? And, what if we left in pairs with a mission?

Imagine a Sunday Mass in which we were actually transformed, changed into new creations. Imagine a Sunday Mass in which we really caught the fire of being what we receive, the Body of Christ. At each Mass we eat of Jesus' flesh, and we drink of Jesus' blood ... and we really do become what we receive. We are transformed. Leaving actually transformed is an amazingly different attitude than what sometimes happens ... leaving with the feeling, the idea, “well, I got that out of the way.” So, we leave transformed, in pairs, with a mission. And the mission is to hand-on the good news of our new creation to others. There is no way to be really happy, really fulfilled, and certainly no way to be joyful without Jesus in our lives. We may think it so, and we may want to believe it is so ..... but it is simply not true. What if we left here today in pairs and agreeing to share Jesus with someone this week. We might bring them a visit of mercy and healing, we might bring them a prayer card with our visit, we might decide to enter some God-talk into a negative situation, a conversation more full of gossip than praise. What if we left here knowing that the God-part of our week was not over but just beginning?

Now, the second 'what if' idea .... what if when we came back next week we began our Holy Mass by hearing a couple stories from you about your missionary work of the past week? What if we took a few minutes to share the rejoicing you have because you were able to share Jesus with someone during the week. Even if you met with rejection, you may actually have a joyful heart simply because of your efforts to share the Lord with someone.

Once caution, however, as I close ..... a really great parish is one in which there continues to be fewer 'what ifs' than “we did”.