

25TH Sunday Ord. Time (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
September 20, 2015

Who are the just ones? Who are the righteous? We sometimes hear and use the words 'self-righteous', and it is usually in a negative kind of way. But who are simply the just and the righteous ones? In preparing for this weekend I found the following:

“Who are the just and the righteous? This is a question that holds little interest for many people. They would be more concerned with knowing who are the successful or who are the famous. In a world rife with jealousy and selfish ambition, righteousness is not a quality that is highly prized. We want people to be honest, at least in their dealings with us, but we are more apt to applaud those who are clever. We commend people who know how to make a good deal, who know how to get ahead, who know how to strike it rich. We extol the beautiful, the strong, the self-assured, those who have made a name for themselves, those who entertain us. We encourage people to be ambitious, to think of themselves first. Seldom is one's popularity based on righteousness.

It is so easy for all of us to fall into this kind of thinking and to analyze and form opinions and even judgments about each other based on the criteria just quoted. Even the apostles of Jesus fell into this kind of behavior. In today's Gospel Jesus catches the disciples having a rather embarrassing conversation: they are arguing about who of them is the greatest, the most important, and maybe even who among them were the favorites of Jesus. It is clear that they were not talking about how righteous and just they were.

To be righteous is one of the pillars upon which God's Kingdom is established. God's reign is not established on cleverness, making good deals, striking it rich. God's reign, and righteousness itself, is rooted in gentleness, mercy, faithfulness and sincerity. Righteous and just people are lovers of peace.

Today is Catechetical Sunday, the day when we are able to acknowledge those who are catechists in our parish. Catechetical Sunday is also a time for the rest of us to think about how we hand on the message of Jesus. How do we model? How do we teach Jesus? And how do we encourage others to be just and to be righteous?

The particular theme for this year's Catechetical Sunday is “Safeguarding the dignity of every human person.” After our Children's School Mass last Thursday, our principal, Jennifer Sornsen, shared with our students how blessed they are to be part of this nation ... with fundamental dignity and certain inalienable rights. September 17 was Constitution Day. And beyond all this we are created in God's

image and created for communion with God. There is no doubt in my mind that one great and sure way to safeguard the dignity of each person is to model the person of Jesus for them ... to act as Jesus acts. And if we teach Jesus and his Kingdom to others, this will also support their dignity.

At the end of today's homily we will call up our catechists and bless them and their ministry for this year. But on this Catechetical Sunday we must caution ourselves. In the area of catechetics it is too easy to think only of 'getting our children some religion'. It is time to throw out that idea, or at least to make that idea secondary to getting ourselves some faith formation. Children will not 'get religion' until we as adults are genuinely formed in our faith. The religion of our childhood simply isn't sufficient for living adult lives. Even if the world was the same as when we got religion as children, what we got then would not be sufficient now. And we all know that the world of today is radically different from the world then.

On Tuesday evening, Archbishop Jackels used a wonderful analogy of what happens too often in the area of religion and faith formation. He referred to what we do if our clothes catch fire: we STOP, DROP, AND ROLL. He said that is what happens too often on school mornings and Wednesday Faith Formation nights: Parents STOP in front of the church, DROP OFF THE CHILDREN, and then, ROLL RIGHT ON BY.

So, what will be helpful to you as an adult as you continue your own faith formation? We can provide you with faith sharing groups, weekday Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, bible study, or some new and creative way to help you grow in righteousness, in Catholic Christian holiness. Just let us know what might work.

If nothing else, here is a very simple home practice for you to do.

The meal table is where family spats can happen. We race in from whatever, intent on getting to the next thing on our schedule. Meal time becomes a quick 'stop' in the midst of frenzied activity. Of course arguments and harsh words will happen in the midst of such frenzy. When you come to the table, take 30 seconds to focus yourself on who is present with you at the table, and who is absent ... then imagine God sitting down with you at your table ... take another 30 seconds to be aware of God. End this with a minute of prayer ... I know your meal time will be different, because this is more than just rattling off a prayer, but really praying. It is real prayer because we have taken time to be present to God and to each other.

This is what Catechetical Sunday and faith formation is all about ... learning to be present to God. Learning how to be just and righteous people. And it is not only for children and teenagers. It is for all of us. This is what will keep us faithful to Jesus,

respectful of each others' dignity, and clear signs of God's Kingdom in the midst of our world. This will even put an end to STOP, DROP, and ROLL.