

26<sup>th</sup> Sun. Ord. Time (B)  
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes  
September 26, 27, 2015

(short skit for Family Weekend Mass based on 1<sup>st</sup> Reading and Gospel)  
few children asked to distribute copies of Children's Nicene Creed for use later in the Mass  
a couple of other children come up and on their own take copies to distribute as well  
Priest stops them, telling them they were not chosen  
someone from congregation counters the Priest by saying they are helping, doing what needs to  
be done, and would that everyone would be prophets, filled with the Spirit, and willing to help.

Our short skit leads into last weekend when we honored catechists, but we also reflected on how each of us has a call to be part of the mission of teaching. It is the privilege, but also the responsibility, of each of us to be catechists in our own families and even beyond. But in our own families first. Parents and guardians are the first and primary faith educators of their children. And to do this we all must continue the formation of our own faith lives.

The complete opposite of this fact is something that has happened in our Church over many past generations. In many ways the Church has taken this privilege and responsibility away from parents and guardians. I feel strongly that at least some of this is because of what is called 'clericalism'. It is my personal opinion that much of the difficulty of the Catholic Church today, and the scandals that have hurt the Catholic Church in the past and most recently in the sex abuse scandals, have their roots in 'clericalism'. So what is clericalism? In my own words, 'clericalism' is the idea that because I am ordained, I have rights and privileges that you don't have....that because I am ordained, I am owed certain honors, and that you are the ones who must give those honors to me. When that kind of thinking takes root in an individual person, in an institution such as a church and even in an individual parish, many negative things will follow ... if not immediately certainly after some time. Clericalism will always, I think, lead to difficulties, scandals, hurt and pain, and eventually to decline. Clericalism leads the priest to taking many ministries of the Church to himself, because he is ordained, and only he is privileged to do them. Then to you, to all of you, is left the ministry of taking care of me and providing for me, so that I can do my things. That, in my words, is what 'clericalism' is. And like any 'ism', those who profit from it don't want it changed, and those on the outside of it often have very little opportunity of changing it.

We have an example of this in two of today's Scriptures: in both Numbers, the First Scripture, and in the Gospel some are found prophesying in the name of the Spirit of God, yet they remain somewhat outside the regular community of believers. Those interested in protecting their power and place within the community object to them doing this. But Moses and Jesus say "let them go ... would that all would be spirit-filled prophets. In this same vein Pope Francis has said, "Lord, let there not be a lack of

prophets among your people. Lord, free your people from a spirit of clericalism and aid them with a spirit of prophecy.”

Those who watch Pope Francis closely say that he is building by example a case against the arrogance and self-satisfaction that allows for the foundation of a class-conscious society of those who make the decisions and those who don't, those who have given up earthly rewards in favor of honorific titles, fancy liturgical attire and, above all, power” It's very much the way he lives; his decision to move into the visitor's quarters and eat his meals with them; his lack of interest in pomp and pageantry; his decision to wash the feet of prison inmates (including women) on Holy Thursday; his genuine concern for the poor and the condition of the Earth. (April 4, 2013 weeks into his papacy). His choice to ride in a small Fiat while here in the United States is just another example.

But as always, there is two sides to every story, and so it is with this 'clericalism' issue. Some in the Church and in parishes get very comfortable allowing the priest, the official catechist, and others with delegated authority, to take over for them. They are, in fact, only too happy to unload the responsibility to someone else. Happily there is a middle ground. We all receive the gifts of the Spirit for the benefit of each other. But we must use them for the service of others, not in a self-serving manner .... which is the root of clericalism. The official leader is servant to the people, and all of us individually must see ourselves as servants to each other. Recall what Jesus did and said at the Last Supper .... he washed the feet of his disciples, and then said, “I have done this as an example to you.”

What gifts do you have to share with your family, with your parish community?

What gifts do you have to share with even the larger community?

What do you leave for others to do, rather than pitching in yourself?

I'll keep inviting and encouraging you to share the ministry and teaching in this parish. And for you, remind me never to get too comfortable in my alb and stole. We are in this together, all of us. We cannot afford to let even one gift go unshared.