

Catechetical Sunday – 2010

Ron: You know who my favorite author is don't you?

Cathy: It's Mark Twain. Right?

Ron: Yep. Mark Twain..I began reading his stuff when I was a little boy and still enjoy reading it today. ...Now, Mark Twain didn't write much about God or religion, but he did have some interesting opinions. ...He once described the Bible as nothing more than a spectacular collection of liars, cheats, crooks and adulterers...all of whom have one disturbing thing in common. You know what that is?

Cathy: Umm,...Let me think about it...Oh, I know...They all blamed it on their mothers?

Ron: That might be true...but that's not what Twain was talking about. Mark Twain said that what all those bad people in the Bible have in common is that, "God likes them!"...Then he said that since God has such a great affection for the riff-raff of the world, he couldn't take the Bible very seriously...I think he was both right and wrongRight that many of the Bible stories are about some pretty rotten characters, and that God seems to like those kind of people – sometimes more than the morally upright ones.... But Twain was wrong in saying that this means we shouldn't take the Bible seriously....What do you think about that?

Cathy: Well, I think that Mark Twain was like a lot of us who think that God should love good people and not love bad people...But the Bible makes two things very clear: First, none of us is as good as we think we are, ...and second, God loves good people and bad people the same, and He sent his son to offer salvation to ALL people...good, bad,...and everyone in between.

Ron: Yah...The Bible – especially the New Testament – gets us away from the idea that God is like the Judge Judy of the universe, sitting on a throne UP THERE watching us DOWN HERE looking for a reason to hurl thunderbolts at us when we mess up....That's not the God that Jesus came to reveal to us.

Cathy: Have you noticed how God often uses shady, sleazy characters in the Bible to teach us something He wants us to know?...Like the crook in today's Gospel....Jesus tells a parable about a dishonest steward who cheated his master...After his boss found out and fired him, the steward thought about his situation and realized he was too lazy to dig ditches, and he was too ashamed to beg,...So he goes to all the people who owed his master money and changes what they owe him to a lower amount...He does this so that when they find out he lost his job, those same people would be so grateful to him, they'd take him into their homes...That was pretty shrewd, don't you think?

Ron: Sure was...In fact, even his boss - when he found out – commends him for his good planning ...for being so clever...which had to totally surprise Jesus' listeners...But what had to be even more shocking is that Jesus - after telling the parable - seems to be holding up the dishonest steward as a model for His disciples to imitate when He says, "For the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of the light."

Now by "children of the world," Jesus meant those who were not living God's way. ...and by "children of the light," Jesus meant those who were trying to follow Him...So what Jesus was saying was "Look how the bad people of this world are so cunning and clever,... and work so hard to scheme and cheat to achieve their selfish ends....Why can't my disciples put as much or more effort into doing those good things that matter to God?"...So, you see, this strange parable does have a lesson for us:...Jesus doesn't want us to be dishonest cheats like the steward in His parable,... but He does want us to act with the same intensity in our commitment to follow Him as the crooks and cheats of the world do to get what they want.

And there's another message here: KEEP UR EYES and EARS OPEN...because God will often try to teach us using the most unlikely teachers...We need to take notice of how ruthless, self-serving people deal with life's challenges...They don't say, "It can't be done." They don't say, "We've never done it that way before."...They find a way to do it....And that's what we have to do...You've heard how many Catholics it takes to change a light bulb?...The answer: The whole parish...one to hold the ladder. ...one to screw in the new bulb...and the rest to talk about how much they liked the old one.

Cathy: Ha, ha. I guess you think that's funny... but, I really don't think we're that bad...You are right, though... Jesus wants us to learn from unexpected sources....to think outside the box...That corrupt steward found a way to make the best of a not-so-good situation...when things were looking pretty bad for him, he got thinking and came up with a way to make things work out for him. As people of faith, we can do that too, and we can tap into **greater** resources than he could...like: prayer...the Eucharist, and a supportive, caring faith community. When Jesus said "I am the way," ...I think that some of what He means is that thru faith in Him, we can find our way thru any difficult, challenging situation.

Nine yrs ago our School of Religion moved from Baumer place into our present school building...and boy was that a challenging situation!...We almost gave into our "can't do" feelings and came close to suspending our classes for that year...Those of you who have been in our school have seen our beautiful classrooms and resource centers,...and you know that our kids are welcomed into an attractive and efficient learning space every time they come to religion class. But I remember our first year here when it wasn't so wonderful.. Because of delays, the class-room wing was still under construction. Plan B was to hold classes in the lower level of this building.

On moving day, I watched as a truckload of chairs and desks pulled into the parking lot, and wondered "how the heck are we were gonna get that stuff from the truck into the building?"...I was feeling overwhelmed when two of our more senior parishioners, Bob Bach and Frank Lahr, had a brainstorm...They loaded the desks and chairs onto carts, tied the carts to the bumper of Bob's car and pulled them to the entrance where a bucket brigade of our teachers passed them, one at a time, into the lower hall and into the makeshift classrooms... Problem solved!

Ron: Yah, I remember...Those two old guys really put us younger guys to shame that day...But that wasn't the end of it ...was it?

Cathy: Nope...There more challenges to come....When classes were finally underway teachers would wait for the kids at the downstairs doors and escort them into the classrooms, carefully navigating around the pipes and piles of building materials in the hallways....Once inside their classrooms they hoped the pounding of hammers, the swirling of construction dust and the occasional ambulance and fire truck at our door ...wouldn't keep them and their kids from doing what they were there to do. ..A less resourceful, determined crew might have thrown up their hands and said, "Enough, we can't have religion classes in these circumstances....let's call everything off until next year!" I believe, in fact, that I did suggest doing just that....and I was met with an instant, loud chorus of "**no-ways!**" So...because of their "can do" attitudeclasses at the School of Religion met....our faith was shared....seeds were nurtured...the mission of the Fr. Kelly School of Religion prevailed.

And, our team of faith-filled teachers – whose ministry we recognize on this Catechetical weekend - continues to think outside the box...to be creative and resourceful when things go differently from what they expected....Get to the school and find out that instead of 15 kids in

your class today, there will be 30 because another teacher has a sick child and can't make it? No problem....put them together and make more copies of the prayer we're learning.....Book order delayed and won't be here for another two weeks? No big deal, let's use a bible story and a song to bring Jesus' message to life this week. Heat not working in the classroom....put the chairs closer together and generate some heat as we play Bible Bingo!

So, sure...nice classrooms and new textbooks and videos are great to have, but just as important as those material resources are the creativity and resourcefulness of the folks who teach. And what's even **more** important are the **spiritual** resources that I mentioned earlier. Our School staff and volunteer teachers realize that prayer, the Eucharist and a caring, supportive pastor and faith community are essential to their mission of helping parents with the faith formation of our children. ...They know that with **these** resources they can handle any of the challenges of their ministry.

An important part of what our teachers do is to show our young people that these same spiritual resources are there to help them make this faith that we love an active, every-day part of their lives...and to help them when they face the challenges that come their way...They teach our children about the power of prayer...and about how Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist to strengthen and nourish us...They teach them that they have a faith community here that believes in Jesus Christ and His Church...a community that cares about them, that supports them,..is here for them:... Parents, family, religion teachers, Fr. Ed and all of the parish staff, and the parishioners of Assumption- all of us - make up the faith community that, together, nurtures the faith of our young people....

Ron: You are so right...again! and that's why on this weekend as we commission over 50 teachers for our School of Religion, we need to realize that we are ALL teachers...We all have a part in forming the faith of our young people...They may not hear us or see us in a School of Religion classroom...but they are watching everything we say and do...They see how we are living the faith we want to pass down to them. ...They see how reverently we worship God...they see our love for the Eucharist...They see our compassion for those who are going thru hard times... They see how hard we try to follow Jesus when what He asks of us sometimes isn't very easy..They are watching us - all of us...Whether we know it or not, we are helping to form their faith.

And so, as we come to the Lord's table, let every one of us pray that in receiving His Body and Blood, ...we will be strengthened in our commitment to be the best of teachers and to pass on the faith to the young ones God places in our care. AMEN.