

I was in our village library the other day, and, as I sometimes do, I scanned the community bulletin board. The following notice caught my eye: LOST DOG - \$50 REWARD! Black and tan, mixed breed, wandered from home on Sept 9. Covered with flea bites. Left hind leg is missing. Has no hair on his rump. Is blind in 1 eye, and was recently neutered. Answers to the name of "LUCKY!" ...Most of us have times in our life when we're a lot like LUCKY. In pretty bad shape, things not going very well for us, wandering, lost, confused, yet we still can be called **lucky**, because - like that dog - we have a master who cares enough about us to look for us, to search for us, to pay to get us back....And God did pay to get us back; it cost Him the life of His Son... We are indeed fortunate - lucky – to have a Master who will never give up trying to find us when we are lost, never give up trying to bring us back. That is the central message of today's Gospel.

The scribes and Pharisees - the religious "in crowd" - were criticizing Jesus for hanging around with street people, tax collectors and sinners. Jesus answered his critics with three parables, one right after the other...He used these stories as a way of saying to them, "You don't understand God...You don't realize that to God all people are important...especially those who have lost their way." ...The shepherd combing the hills tirelessly searching for a lost sheep;... the woman with a broom in hand scouring every corner of her house for the lost coin;... the father with a heavy heart, waiting and longing for his lost son to come home. These were all images Jesus used to show how passionately God cared for the ones the scribes and Pharisees regarded as dirty, lost sinners. ...To God they were sons and daughters who had gone astray, and Jesus had been sent to help them find their way back to God....This is the Good News Jesus proclaimed then and proclaims now to all who would listen:...that EVERY person is important to God,...even those who've turned away from Him, even those so steeped in sin that they seem lost beyond redemption... Yes, even them...We can never be so lost that God says, "He's not worth it," or "She's not worth it." Like the shepherd searching for the lost sheep and the woman searching for the lost coin, God will search for us with a passion beyond imagining, ... ready to take us back....And if we're not ready, He'll wait for us; He'll wait patiently with arms open wide just like the father in the third parable.

Now even though Jesus was talking here about being lost in sin, there are many other ways we can be lost ...many ways we can separate ourselves from God...We can be so lost in our fear and anxiety about what's going to happen tomorrow, that we don't reach for the God who is right here today...We can be so lost in our grief, so emotionally devastated that we fail to recognize God's presence in the people He sends to comfort us and help us get through it...We can be so lost in our hatred and anger toward someone that we won't even consider forgiving them,...so lost that we forget how often the Lord has forgiven us...We can be so lost in our own stuff that we fail to sense that God is near us...fail to see that God is right there... We can be like the young boy caught in a house fire, hanging out of the upstairs window. His father was on the ground below and kept calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you."But all the boy could see was flames, smoke, and blackness....He was afraid to jump....His father yelled again: "Don't be afraid, I'll catch you." ...The boy yelled back, "Daddy, I can't see you."...The father answered, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."...You see, even if we can't see God, He can see us and that's all that matters... God's always there calling us to jump into His loving, caring arms!

One of the best ways God. has of showing His love and care for us is through the people He sends to carry on Jesus's teaching ministry...One such group of people are the teachers – catechists- who, in a generous spirit of stewardship, have answered God's call to share their time and talents...to teach us, remind us that God is not out there in some far-off corner of the universe. ...but is right here where we are...to teach us, remind us of all that God has given us and has done for us,...to teach us, remind us what it is God wants us to do to with the gift of life He has given us...Today – Catechetical Sunday – we recognize and honor the people who do this

in our parish, our catechists...Cathy, the Director of our School of Religion will tell us about our largest group of catechists, the teachers in School of Religion.

A couple of weeks ago, Ron and I were in Seattle visiting our 4 ½ year old grand daughter. One of the jobs she assigned me while I was there was to take her to bed. Each night I would take her upstairs, we'd do the toothbrushing, the stories, the lullabies, of course a snuggle...and always a blessing before I left her room. One night after we had thanked God for the great day we had, she hugged me and then asked, "Nannie...do you believe in God?"...That floored me...I wasn't expecting that a question like that could come from her young heart....and my reaction was an immediate, "Sure, I do." And then with her little arms still around my neck and looking into my eyes...came the question that comes from almost all 5 year olds about any and everything ..."Why?"...Why, Nan do you believe in Go?"...My response was automatic..."I just do." She was satisfied with that...gave me a hug and permission to leave her room.

Well, even though she was satisfied with my answer. I wasn't. As I thought about it, I realized that I don't "just do" believe in God. I realized that my faith in God, grew and developed because of the people who brought God into my life...the people who helped me to know who and what God is...the people who showed me God's love through their love.

If you are old enough to remember the Baltimore Catechism, then you remember that one of the questions on the very first page was..."Who Made Me?" (God made me) "Why did God make me?" (God made me to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him, and to be happy with Him in this world and the next.) Notice the order here: know...love...serve

Before we can truly love God, we need to know God. God gives us many opportunities to know Him...God reveals Himself to us through the scripture He inspired, through the wonders of everything He has created, and, most fully, through His son, Jesus. Another way God helps us to know Him is through the people He places in our lives. Our first concepts of God are usually formed by our families. They are the ones who first said God's name to us...the first ones to tell us about Jesus, the first ones to teach us our prayers...the first ones to tell us how much God loves us....the first ones to help us understand that God is truly here with us and for us every moment of our lives...and they are first ones to tell us and show us how to live as followers of Jesus.

The folks we recognize today join with families in helping children to know God....These men and women who bring life to our children's faith formation program at Assumption do more than just show up once a week and open a book. They share their own faith stories with our kids, they encourage our children to share with others, they help our kids to pray...for people who are close to them and for people they may never even meet. They instill in our young people a love for Jesus and our faith that will be life lasting, and they help them to see how what they read in their textbooks is connected to what they and see and hear in our Sunday celebrations....and how it is all connected to what happens in their lives every day...They believe that our kids need to experience all of these things in order to really KNOW God....to love God...and to be able to show their love by serving Him in serving others.

In his homily, Deacon Ron told us that God shows his love and care for us through the people He sends to carry on Jesus' teaching ministry. We at Assumption are so grateful for the people who have answered God's call - the volunteer faculty of The Fr. Kelly School of Religion...the 60 or so men, women and teens who present the beliefs, teachings and traditions of our Church, and share this faith that we cherish with more than 800 children a week.

Each of them has his or her own creative ways of making the Gospel message come alive for their students. Our teachers work hard to help our kids grow in their knowledge and love of God. And so, as we bless them and send them forth today, we ask that you pray for them...not only today, but throughout the year...that God will bless them and their ministry....and certainly the little ones they will minister to. AMEN.