

Whenever I hear this Gospel I can't help admiring the father in Jesus' parable who ordered his sons to go work in the vineyard...I was never that tough with my 2 sons...but maybe I should've been, because I remember many a hot, sticky day when I'd be out in the yard, mowing, weeding, and mulching, while my teenage sons sat in air-conditioned comfort watching TV... And I remember thinking, "Why should I have to ask them to come out and help me? ...Can't they see I'm working my butt off out here?"...I guess I was too stubborn to ask, and they certainly weren't going to volunteer...I should've been more like the father in the parable....At least he got one of them to do some work. ...Well, I don't think Jesus told this parable to show us how to handle our lazy teenagers...Sorry! That's not politically correct; I should've said "energetically challenged" teenagers...Anyway, even Jesus doesn't have an answer for that one.

So why did Jesus use this parable?...First off, Jesus wanted the Jewish religious leaders to see that they were like the 2nd son in the parable....They were long on words and short on actions, promising God they would follow His way,... but then they really didn't....This parable, though, isn't JUST about what happened a long time ago...There's a message in it for us today about what it means to do the will of God.

We are all sons and daughters of God, and every day God comes to us and says," Go and work in my vineyard." His vineyard of course is the world, and we each have different sections of the vineyard: the places where we live and work and play, the places where we worship, where we go to school, and the places where we just hang out...And God - the Master of the vineyard - has given us the tools that we need – our faith, compassion, our gifts and talents, our skills and abilities - to go into that vineyard and get our hands dirty...trim those vines, pull those weeds, mend those fences.

We heard St. Paul tell us in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading what it means to toil in God's vineyard: *Humbly regard others as more important than yourselves. Look out not for your own interests but for the interests of others. Have the same attitude that Christ had – emptying himself, humbling himself...*Tough words - but words that define what it means to be a Christian...It's the attitude God wants us to take into His vineyard, into our world....to serve our brothers and sisters every way we can.

My friends, when it comes to doing the will of God, talk is cheap; it's actions that count....What we do matters more than what we say...God expects more from us than just saying the right words. ...He tells us as much in the Letter of James, Ch 2: "What good is it if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you do not give them what they need, what good is it?...Faith, if it does not have works, is dead." ...If our faith brings us to church to say the right words, sing the songs, receive the Body and Blood of Christ, and yet it doesn't move us to do works that serve our brothers and sisters, then it IS dead... It is doing nothing to build the Kingdom of God...It is DEAD!

So, what do we say when God says, "Go and work in my vineyard."? Well, some people say, "OK, Lord, I'll do it. You can count on me...But not just yet; I'm kinda busy...As soon as things quiet down."...And sometimes they never do make it into the vineyard...and then they find themselves standing before the King on Judgment Day pleading, " Gee, Lord, if I'd only had more time. ...Ya know, I was just about ready to jump right in there when that trumpet sounded...I just didn't have enough time."...Then there are some people who say, "No, Lord, I can't do what you're asking. I'm no good at it...I don't have the necessary gifts....I'm afraid I'll just mess it up"

...But you know, these are the people God won't stop pursuing – the ones who feel inadequate, who fear they can't live up to God's standards...God will keep after this type of person because they are humble enough to realize they can't do it on their own capabilities alone. They need God's help. ...So God keeps after them: "Go and work in my vineyard...I'll be there with you." ...And many of them do change their minds and finally say, "OK, Lord, here I am, I've come to do your will." ...I'll bet that a lot of the folks we are honoring and thanking today – the teachers in the School of Religion – would recognize themselves in this group.

**Cathy:** And you know, Deacon Ron, that's a bet you would win. I know that from many years of inviting folks to consider teaching in our Fr. Kelly School of Religion, and I know that from my own experience when I was invited into this ministry by a tiny Mission Helper nun 37 years ago. My initial response, was like the response of many of the folks I talk to: "Me? Teach religion?...I can't do that.....Ask me to do something else....anything else!!" But then Sr. Alma looked right into my eyes and told me what I tell folks now.... about the training and the resources and support available for this ministry, and about the joy it brings to us who are part of it. And then she asked me...to pray about it...to ask the Holy Spirit to help make the decision. Well, the Holy Spirit did His stuff, and here I am... and more often than not, the Holy Spirit inspires the hearts of the people I have invited to be part of this ministry...and they call me and say, "OK, Cathy, I'll give it a try."

Our volunteer faculty consists of more than 70 volunteers this year, sharing their faith in more than 60 different classes from pre-school through high school...Our parish is very blessed to have them. In a few moments as they stand to receive our blessing and appreciation, you will see people you know: moms, dads, single adults, teens, grammas and grampas ...Each of them has accepted God's charge to go and work in the vineyard....to tend the seeds of faith that families have **already** sown in our young people, to partner with families in helping our children grow in the love, the knowledge and the practice of our faith.

I wish that I could introduce you to each of these 70 catechists...I wish that you could see for yourself how dedicated they are to our children and to our faith,...how they interact with our young people in their classes. I wish that you could see the love and care they put into their lessons. ....into their ministry...But that's not possible...The best I can do is to take you on a "virtual tour" of our School of Religion & let you peek into the classroom windows and experience what happens there.

First, we would pop into the Pre-K classroom downstairs where you would find 20 of our littlest students, eyes all big and excited as they are dropped off by their parents and take their places at child size tables and chairs. Their teachers are two high school seniors, who started by being helpers in the classroom as they grew up, and took over the teaching of the class during their Confirmation Service Project work in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. They are helped by a parent aide as they welcome each child with smiles and hugs. The stories, songs and simple lessons the children learn in the next few months will be the start of their formal faith formation.

Now let's look into a second grade classroom where we'll find a team of veteran teachers - who've been teaching together for a long time - helping their kids get ready to celebrate First Holy Communion in the Spring. We can see the joy and enthusiasm they radiate as they help the children understand the awesomeness of Jesus coming to us in the Eucharist.

If you're looking for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders, you might find them here in church with their teachers - maybe one of our mom and son teams - checking out the baptismal font, the altar, the processional cross...asking questions like "Why do we dip our fingers in holy water and make the sign of the cross when we come into church?" "Why does someone always carry the cross in at the beginning of Mass? Why does the color of the banner change behind the altar?"...And you would hear their teachers tell them about the sacredness of this space... that we honor and respect this space because this is where we come together to honor and praise God.

Look into our middle school classrooms and you will find men and women helping our young people to understand scripture. Bibles are on desks, scripture verses on the whiteboards...and the race is on to see who can be first to find the cited passage ...Bible Bingo is a great hit in 6<sup>th</sup> grade!!! Our 7<sup>th</sup> graders follow the life of Jesus...from the announcement of His birth through His passion and death and glorious resurrection...and they learn that His life continues...that He does, indeed live today...In 8<sup>th</sup> grade our kids trace the history of our church...it's earliest beginnings...the changes that have taken place over the years...what's happening now....and how important it is that they see themselves as part of this church...as members of the Body of Christ.

If you look into a Confirmation class, you might recognize that middle school teacher from Johanna Perrin - the one you see at the LifeTeen Mass - or that mom you see in church every Sunday with her kids....That's how faithful they are to their commitment to help prepare our young people to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation. They and the other Confirmation catechists come up with amazing ways to break open the Apostles Creed for our kids so that they will have a true understanding of what we believe as Catholics. If you come on "Gifts of the Holy Spirit" class night, you will see brightly wrapped packages being handed out, and a spirited discussion about the gifts of the Holy Spirit...And if you want to know about saints...stop by on the night our candidates read their saint essays...You will learn about saints you never knew existed.

Over the past couple of weeks, we have heard Fr. Ed and some of our parishioners tell us how important stewardship is in our lives and in our parish...how we are called by our baptism to live as stewards of the gifts God has given us; to share our time, our talent and our treasure...to help spread the Good News and to build up God's Kingdom. I hope this little glimpse into our SoR life has given you some idea of how our teachers share their **time** and **talent** by passing on the teachings, beliefs and traditions of our Catholic faith, not just from textbooks, but by telling their own faith stories...by letting their faith, their love for Jesus...shine through to their students. And I hope I've helped you understand that the **treasure** our teachers share with our children is Jesus...the Living God...the cornerstone of our faith...the hope of our lives...a precious gift that will be with them through all of their joys and sorrows...bad times and good times...a gift they will some day pass on to their children.

As we bless (commission) them today, and send them forth to begin the SoR year, we thank them for their faithfulness, for their commitment, and for the love they have for our faith and for our children. We thank them for saying "Yes" when God said, "Go and work in my vineyard."