

JMJ

When I was a young man in my 20's living in Ann Arbor, I picked up the local newspaper and saw an advertisement where they put out a call for singers to come and audition for the University Musical Society's annual presentation of *Handel's Messiah*. Now, I enjoy singing -- I've got a decent voice, I can sing on key, but I'm not a very technical singer. So I was very nervous about the audition but I decided to give it a try. Yes, many were called by that advertisement but in the end only a few were chosen. And I was one of them. I sang with them for several years.

That final passage from today's Gospel has been a bit problematic for commentators throughout the years, "Many are called but few are chosen". What was Jesus really saying? Doesn't it seem kind of unfair? The poor guy was invited but he didn't have that wedding garment so he was thrown on the street. What's that all about? Well remember last week when I talked about various Bible passages becoming something like household words? The culture picks them up and makes them into figures of speech or idioms that we are all familiar with.

Out of curiosity I decided to "Google" it to see how the secular society understands this, and it was there that I found the analogy of an audition. Aha, that's it! Our life is like an audition. The Jews, the chosen people, rejected Jesus and so we Gentiles were called but in the end, not all of us will be chosen. Not all will enter the "Pearly Gates". Not all will attend the "Eternal Banquet". Not all will be saved. This is not a new idea -- there are other similar passages: "Enter by the narrow gate," Jesus said, "Because wide is the way to destruction. And many choose the path of least resistance." And how about this one? "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father." Another passage would seem to apply to us priests. At our judgement we may find ourselves complaining to the Lord, "Did we not eat and drink with you? Did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name and perform great miracles?" And he will reply, "Away from me you workers of iniquity. I never knew you!" Yikes! Yes, there are many scriptural passages that warn us that entrance into heaven will not be easy. So it seems to me that we should again review what we need to do to make sure that on our big day, that is our judgment day, that we have that wedding garment on.

Last week we celebrated the feast of St. Francis of Assisi. One of the sayings that has been attributed to him is this one: "Preach the Gospel always, and if need be use words." Now this is basic stuff. It's important, but this is the minimalist approach to faith. It's the least we can do. We should ask: Will a person I meet somehow recognize that there is something about me that sets me apart from the rest of the world? I think it was just last week that St. Paul said that we should have a certain peace about us, a peace that surpasses all understanding. And that we should radiate joy, a joy that no one can take from us. Do we have this? Is there a smile on our

face? How do we carry ourselves out there in the world? Are we pleasant and affable? Are we approachable? Are we gracious with all we meet? Non-judgmental? Calm? Patient? Long-suffering? Do we conduct ourselves with the dignity befitting a Christian? Do our lives get lived above reproach?

Or, are we fearful, nervous wrecks, gossips, complainers? Angry, unsure of ourselves? Timid, politically correct? And how do we look? That is, our physical appearance. Do we take care of ourselves? Do we wash our face and comb our hair and brush our teeth? Do we dress appropriately? Yes, modestly, of course, not drawing any attention to ourselves in any inappropriate way. But in a more proactive sense, is there any way that we can evangelize just by how we physically look? Let me use the example of us priests and religious. The very fact that we wear clerical garb is a means of evangelization. People see us and they naturally think of God. Not a word need be spoken. But in recent years it has been trendy for Priests to be more casual. At the end of the work day they dress down, takeoff the black and put on their Hawaiian shirts when they go off into public. Many of us in recent times have come back to our senses. One time I asked myself if I ever saw Pope John Paul II in cut off blue jeans or Mother Teresa in casual clothes? The answer was no.

How about you? Is there any indicator on you that you are a disciple of Jesus? It could be very subtle--a crucifix around your neck, perhaps a miraculous medal, worn on the outside. How about the two little feet of a 10 week old preborn child? That's a pro-life statement. And it could provide an opportunity for a discussion with the cashier in the grocery store, or in the line on Election Day. There are many people who promote their cause on T-shirts and baseball hats. OK, you're a fan of Harley Davidson. Great! Or of the Detroit Tigers. Great! But are you a fan of Jesus? Do you have any shirts or hats that advertise that fact? How about your house? Is there anything out front that would show that a Catholic Christian lives inside? Is there a statue of the Blessed Mother? Do you know there are some communities where devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is so strong that almost every house has a statue of her in the front yard? In our Diocese, in the German farm community of Westphalia, that's the case. And it should be noted they have traditionally had one of the highest vocation rates in the state-Fr Matthias at St.Pat's is one.

When a person comes into your house, will they find a crucifix prominently displayed, or a statue of a saint, a religious painting, or anything that indicates that you are a Catholic? Will you have a Bible on the coffee table? What kind of books do you have on your bookshelves? Do you have a Catechism? Lives of the Saints, books that address the issues of our times? Our Book and Gift Shop has a wonderful selection. I mentioned my favorites in last week's bulletin article. Do you read my bulletin article? Have you ever passed-it-on to anyone?

What kind of things do you watch on TV? I find that there are still many people who don't even know what EWTN it is. They know about ESPN but not EWTN. And how about WDEO, the Catholic radio station? (Deo is Latin for "God.") How many of you listen to that? Do you subscribe to a Catholic publication? Several years ago at the back of the church we had the *Our Sunday Visitor* magazine. We canceled our subscription because nobody ever took one home. So yes, there are many things that we can do without even saying a word.

But, that phrase about preaching the Gospel without words can also be a cop out. It can be used as an excuse for not being more vocal about what we stand for. Standing in contrast to the minimalist approach is the commandment that says we must love the Lord our God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength. This is the more proactive proclamation of the Gospel. Things like prayer, fasting, abiding with Jesus in Eucharistic Adoration, service to our neighbors, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, and saying grace before meals-out loud, in restaurants.

St. Peter said that we should always be ready with an answer for those who ask us about the joy that is within us. So yes, indeed, we have to be more courageous, ready, willing, and able to live our faith and also to share it and proclaim it. When my courage is lacking I try to remind myself of the courage and boldness of little girl saints, virgin martyrs like St. Maria Goretti, St. Joan of Arc, and our very own St. Philomena. In these crazy times that we live in, we will have new opportunities to be salt for the earth and a light for the world. And the light of our faith should not be kept under the bushel basket, but on top of it.

A few weeks ago I talked about the *Illumination of Conscience*. On my mini-vacation last week I read from the book called, "The Warning" which is about the illumination. Some feel that it is coming up rather quickly. I also read about Sister Nicolina Kohler. Telling her own story she said that by all appearances she was a good nun. She had dedicated her life to God's service. She wore the full habit and she had a devotion to the Eucharist. She was jovial and outgoing. She admitted to having a few quirky things about her, but she always had an explanation or excuse. She liked to talk about the positive side of faith, but not the cross. And she was not very public in her sharing of the faith. She also admitted that her fellow sisters thought she was a bit too flirtatious in the presence of men.

She told the story of going to a Bible school in Jerusalem where she met people from all over the world who wanted to learn more about the sacred scriptures. She was the only one in a habit. But she met a young Lutheran girl named Ruth. Ruth was also very exuberant and outgoing and shared her faith openly. Publicly. And the two hit it off. One day Ruth invited the sister to join her on an early morning pilgrimage to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. There, before the large crowds arrived, they would be able to crawl under the altar and reach down into a hole and literally touch the top of Mount Calvary where Jesus was crucified. Sister was very resistant.

What would people think? She made excuses, trying to get out of it. It wasn't her 'cup of tea'. She felt uncomfortable, it was too public a display of faith for her. Nevertheless, not wanting to look like a heathen in the front of her Protestant friend, she eventually agreed. She got on her knees, crawled underneath the altar, and reached down in the hole and touched the top of the crucifixion mount. And there she wept bitterly for the next two hours. It was during that time that she was given her own personal illumination of conscience. God, in his tender mercy, showed Sister Nicolina how she really appeared before Him, and before the world--her attitudes, and her sarcasm, her ego, her insistence on always being the center of attention, all of this, and more, was made clear to her. And she came out from under that altar a changed person.

After reading that story I decided that I would go to Fr. Jim, the pastor of Holy Cross Church that I was visiting with on Beaver Island, and I made a general confession. So if that worldwide *Illumination of Conscience* should happen any time soon, well, I'll be ready. And I will be ready for you in the confessional as well.

And so, again, in anticipation of that big day, I invite all of you to look inward and assess your Catholicism. Find a good *Examination of Conscience*. Ask the Lord to send the Holy Spirit to brighten the dark corners of your soul, to remove the scales from your eyes, to erase any confusion, to lead you to all truth, and to impart wisdom so as to make good and wise choices from this point on.

It's not God's desire that anybody should be lost. He wants everybody to put on that wedding garment and to never take it off, to endure the audition, to be among the chosen, and to be deemed worthy to sing in the heavenly choir.

+Fr. J