

## Unleash the Gospel Homily #1

[Readings: Deut. 6:2-6; Ps. 18; Heb. 7:23-28; Mark 12:28-34]

This weekend, in Catholic parishes all around the Archdiocese of Detroit, this weekend has been designated as “Unleash the Gospel” weekend. But first, a commentary on today’s readings, courtesy of Fr. Stephen Pulis, Director of Evangelization, Catechetics and Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of Detroit.

There are many names for Jesus in the New Testament: Lord, Master, Friend, Christ. All of these point to a different aspect of the person and mission of Jesus. Today, Jesus is referred to as “Teacher.” Think about a great teacher you had in your life. What were their inspiring characteristics?

They were good at conveying the message – they helped us learn something new. They were passionate about their subject – not just imparting knowledge but imparting passion. They were challenging – they brought more out of us than we knew we had; they made us grow.

Jesus is called teacher because he *teaches* us something new. He conveys a new message – a new reality – to us. He touches not just our head but our hearts as well. And He calls us to grow; to be challenged in what the deepest meaning of life is. He says to the scribe: “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.” What is missing in the scribe? He needs to move from *knowing* the commandments to *doing* the commandments with the love of God, others and self. The hardest journey for him and for all of us is the shortest distance from the head (knowledge) to the heart (decision-making). Until our faith takes root in our heart, we will not yet be at the Kingdom.

To be incorporated into the Kingdom of God is to be transformed by God’s love. This can only happen through baptism; but we must *receive* it. We must take on a new heart. This transformation happens through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us to grow; to be challenged in what the deepest meaning of life is. So what does He teach us? He teaches us what it means to be a disciple; this involves two steps.

Step One is to: *Love God first, with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength.* Jesus reveals to us who God is. God's heart is made known to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, as we hear in the Second Reading, "offered himself" for us. God loves us to such a degree that He holds nothing back from us. His love for us is radical and intense. And because God's gift to us is limitless – *all of himself* – God can ask for all of us: our heart – the place of our decision-making and our soul – with our eternal destination in mind. Your mind – what you fill your mind with; the study and knowledge of God! And your strength – loving God is a battle against temptation; it requires a fight!

Step Two is to: *Love your neighbor as yourself.* St. John tells us, "Whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (1Jn 4:20). Disciples are called to follow Jesus; to love the people He loved. And He loved everyone. Because Jesus willingly gave Himself up for others, we are called to love them in deed, as well.

How do we become better disciples? We have been in the midst of a "missionary conversion" in the Archdiocese of Detroit over the past four years. This means learning from *the teacher* what it means to be a disciple. It means we commit to following Jesus.

We have a road map – a key – to following Jesus in the Archdiocese of Detroit. We are calling it *Unleash the Gospel*. It is the vision for the movement for each of us to become a particular kind of disciple: a band of JOYFUL MISSIONARY DISCIPLES! The Lord is inviting us to return to what it means for us to be disciples of Jesus. This is what *Unleash the Gospel* is about.

*Unleash the Gospel* is our movement in the Archdiocese of Detroit, our mission to move into the Kingdom of God. There are three parts: Being outward focused, moving from an attitude of maintenance to an attitude of mission -- our faith moving beyond the physical church. Claiming our identity – we have power over sin in our lives. Leaning in to the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit – being bold witnesses for the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Why now? Why introduce this movement right now?

Current circumstances teach us about sin. Sin is powerful. If we allow it to, sin can/will corrupt our lives. We see how sin has corrupted even high-ranking Church leaders. Sin is prevalent. It is everywhere and all of us must confront it. The Church and her members are not immune from the challenges and the scandal of sin – even grave sin. But Jesus Christ stronger than sin, and His Body, the Church is stronger than sin because we have the Holy Spirit, we have the Seven Sacraments, we have the Word of God, and we have a 2000-year history of kicking some major devil butt!

Ultimately, Jesus Christ is all we have to offer. The Church's only mission is to point to Christ – even if we can only do it poorly at times. Jesus is the answer to every human life. Every person, whether they know it or not, was created to know Jesus Christ. He is *the* one and *the only* one who fulfills us. St. Paul reminds us that where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

The cross teaches us that even the tremendous tragedy of Good Friday can bring about something great on Easter Sunday. In our time of sin and scandal, Jesus is calling us to know this His grace is even more abundant right now, right here in the Archdiocese of Detroit!

We must seize this opportunity of God's grace so that we can become "Spirit-led and Spirit-fed," totally obedient to Jesus! We must return to the fundamental reality of the Gospel: that Jesus Christ offered Himself "once for all" and gives us the power to live as His disciples, as His friends, and as His brothers and sisters, daughters and sons of the One God and Father

This is the meaning of *Unleash the Gospel* as a movement. We have the opportunity now to be more than "not far" from the Kingdom. I'm going to ask two volunteer Archdiocesan missionaries who are with us this weekend, Tom Francis and Marisa Rosenbaum, to come forward and share an opportunity we have this week to take the first step in this direction...