

Nov. 3 & 4, 2018
Feast of All Saints
Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Parish

All Saints Parish, Syracuse
Fr. Frederick D. Daley
Pastor

There is a true story of a man who was very active in his church, a proud Christian in his rural Ohio community ... who was filled with hatred, prejudice, and downright, ignorance toward the Amish people who were moving into the area, buying up the farms as the old-timers moved into the city. He would boast:

“Yes, I ran that horse and buggy off the road! I’d run all the Amish out of the country if I could!”

(I guess that’s called making America great again!)

He was constantly telling scornful stories about the Amish – most of the time without any evidence – and would joke about how his ancestors drowned ‘those Anabaptists in 16th Century Europe.’ He would mock out their simple lives, their horse-drawn buggies and old style of dress, and would hassle them at every chance he could get. Although seeing himself as very religious, never missing church and always following his religious customs, his heart was hardened blinded by prejudice, ignorance and hatred.

This “religious” man was enslaved by that terrible age-old cycle where ignorance leads to fear – fear leads to hatred – and hatred so often leads to violence the very cycle that is being played out in our nation and world today.

One hot, humid summer afternoon there was a terrible thunderstorm and the hate filled man’s barn was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. As soon as the ash heap cooled, Amish people from all around gathered to begin clearing the rubble, drawing up plans, cutting timber and scheduling a barn raising. When the day came for the event, the man’s barnyard was swarming with men in straw hats and barn-door denims! By evening the great framework was complete; the roof, sheeted and the siding was going up... and the man-filled-with-hatred, stood in the driveway shaking his head wordlessly, tears running down his face. He was then invited to sit at the head of a long table covered with homemade bread, noodles, chicken, date pudding, and rivers of lemonade – prepared by the Amish women and they all broke bread together.

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Sisters and brothers, I share this story on the Feast of All Saints and the 10th Anniversary of our parish, because it is a story – a true parable – of what the Gospel of Jesus is all about. It is a story of what the Beatitudes are all about, what liturgy and the Eucharist is all about.... It’s a story of what all the Saints were all about! It’s a story of what our Parish is all about!

The Amish community – the Amish Parish we could say – confronted evil with love. They did not condone the evil, they did not become victims of the evil, but they converted evil with love: “love your enemy;” “pray for those who persecute you.”

“Blessed are they whose hearts are compassionate;
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice;
Blessed are the merciful and forgiving;
Blessed are the pure of heart who live with integrity;
Blessed are those who work for peace;
Blessed are they who speak truth to power –
even if it means getting insulted and persecuted.
The reign of God, the realm of God, the Kingdom of God is with you!”

Through unconditional love, the man’s heart was changed: his prejudice and ignorance, the lies and myths and stereotypes melted. He begged the community for forgiveness... and they became friends.

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Sisters and brothers, ten years ago our Syracuse Diocese, as we are all aware, went through a parish reconfiguration process that ultimately closed 41 parishes. At one point in the process, The Diocese floated a plan to close all the parishes on the city’s southeast side and create a mega-church at Holy Cross. (!!)

Because of the very negative reaction of the community, it was ultimately determined that Our Lady of Solace and St. Therese Parishes, after they each had served their neighborhoods for 82 years, would merge into a single parish at the St. Therese campus. From the pain and struggle, determination and creativity, All Saints Parish was birthed into existence on November 1, 2008. What a ride it has been!

Shortly after opening there was the senseless closing of the St. Andrew’s Parish in January 2009; followed by the scandalous process of the closing of St. Mary’s in Jamesville. About a third of the St. Andrew’s parishioners found a home in All Saints and we are blessed with a number of families from St. Mary’s.

Out of all the parishes in the city, we are the only one that has increased in numbers each year of our existence. I won’t go through all the details [there is a beautiful history of our Parish composed by our Meg Ksander, in our all liturgy program] but something wondrous and beautiful is happening in this little plot of holy ground on Syracuse’s southeast side..., don’t you agree?

How has this happened?

- 1) Since day one, we have been faithful to our parish mission to be an *open* and *diverse* and *inclusive* community where *all are welcome!* All are welcome to the Table of the Lord: no insiders; no outsiders. How are we doing with this dream?
- 2) We have worked to be faithful to our mission that we be *joyfully grounded in the Eucharist!* Like the Amish folks at the dinner table at the barn-raising, we gather to be fed, nourished, and challenged by the Body and Blood of Christ. Our Sabbath worship is the core of what we are all about! How are we doing with this dream?
- 3) We have been faithful to our mission to ‘receive the Body of Christ – to become the body of Christ.’ We gather, *only to be sent*, to go out to be the Body of Christ: the hands, the feet, the heart of Jesus called to bring Good News. To be a little bit of salt and light and hope to our families, relationships, our city, our nation, our world... . How are we doing with this dream?
- 4) We’ve been faithful to our mission *of loving service to all*, called to join with others in accompanying the poor, the marginalized, the addicted, the refugees, the undocumented, the sick; and creating a Catholic parish (which I like to call: “the parish of last resort”) where Catholics – rejected and hurt – can find a welcoming home. How are we doing with this dream?
- 5) Our mission of loving service to all has called us to “go upstream” and look at the unjust structures and systems in our culture and in our church: patriarchy, clericalism, racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, the unjust immigration system... and the list goes on; to join with other folks to challenge the evil systems and create some new ones, to work for justice in society and in our church. How are we doing with this dream?

Reflecting on our dream draws me to Pope Francis’ words:

“I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (¶27)

I ask you now to stand as we recommit ourselves to the Parish and to our Mission.

Amen!