

Touched by Jesus

Has anyone ever heard of St. Sadie? The theologian Mary McGLone, reflecting that today's Gospel, tells us that St. Sadie is one of the seldom noticed model disciples in Mark's Gospel. In today's Gospel from Mark, St. Sadie shows us what happens when one is touched by Jesus.

Mark didn't actually tell us her name, he only identified her as 'the mother of Peter's wife' — because in those patriarchal times, women and children for the most part, remain nameless in the Biblical texts, because they were not considered all that important..., *but* she *is* important enough to deserve a name and calling her Sadie, says McGLone, is easier than continually referring to her as "Peter's mother-in-law"! All this tells us also that St. Peter — who in Church tradition was considered the first Pope — was a married man! (*That could be the subject of another homily...!*)

By now you might be wondering: 'Where am I going with all this?' Let's look a bit closer at the Gospel story:

Jesus went with Peter and his friends to get something to eat (maybe a humus sandwich and some stuffed grape leaves...), discussing their whirlwind day — going from the seashore to the synagogue — they no sooner get to the house, they find out that the chief cook — Sadie — is laid low with a fever! Jesus wastes not a moment, but goes right to her bed-side, takes her by the hand raises her up — and the fever left her!

Some might read this testimony to emphasizing that Sadie has was no weakling or hypochondriac but a hospitable Jewish mother — ever ready to set the table!

Someone else might say that is a story reinforcing women's servitude: '...sure, what's new, a lunch of men come home — there's no lunch waiting for them, so instead of fixing some food for themselves, they have Jesus cure the lady of the house to she could wait on them...'

Scripture scholars tell us there is a much deeper meaning beneath the story:

Once a person is touched by Jesus: "He grasped her hand and helped her up" — one answers that call — one immediately become a disciple, and, consequently *has no choice* but to serve others. The fever leaves and service begins. God's service to Sadie becomes Sadie's service to others — *that's* what discipleship is all about.

Scripture scholars tell us that Mark used the word *diakoneo* (the Greek word that means ‘to serve’ – ‘to wait on’ – ‘to minister to’ – from which we get our word “*deacon*”) The word hints that Mark might have used this story to introduce to us Sadie, our faith first Christian Deacon! When Mark says that Sadie “waited on them” he is giving her higher praise than the apostles ever earned. He is telling us that Sadie accepted the gift Jesus was offering the world and responded by becoming a servant like him...! Mark uses this word – *diakoneo* – only two other times in his Gospel: once, quoting Jesus as saying “I’ve come to serve not to be served,” and second, in speaking about the women at the cross the end... .

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What might all this have to do with us here at All Saints Parish in February 2018?

Sisters and brothers, I would dare say that we’ve all been touched by Jesus... in Baptism and Confirmation, in the Word, in the Eucharist, in our day-to-day lives, in prayer and our life experience..., or we wouldn’t be here this morning... We’d be home getting our dips ready for Super Bowl Sunday!

And, like St. Sadie being touched by Jesus, we are called to serve – to wait on others – to minister to others – and to the extent that we, as disciples of Jesus, touched by Jesus, reach out with other people of goodwill and touch others, recognizing the inherent sacredness and dignity and uniqueness of every person and all people, the world will become – little-by-little – what God intends: “Thy Kingdom ... Thy kindom (I love to use the word kindom – because we are all kin to one another) ...on earth *as in* heaven!

That’s what our Parish Mission Statement is all about:

*“In the spirit of Vatican II, All Saints parish is
an open & welcoming Catholic Christian community,
joyfully grounded in the Eucharist
that strives to live the Gospel call to holiness and loving **service** to all.”*

“Loving service to all”!

One of the many miracles of the Second Vatican Council was the declaration and re-emphasis of the ancient church teaching from the Gospel: that *through baptism we all share in the priesthood of Jesus*, we are *all ministers* called to use the gifts God has given us to build-up the reign of God. When a person is anointed at baptism with the oil of Chrism, the prayer reads: “As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always a member of his body!”

So the ancient practice of the Church – that recognizes that we are all priests through baptism, and called to ministry – was neglected for hundreds of years... (the role of the lay-person was to “pray and pay”) and the “ministry” of the Church was primarily in the hands of the ordained.

Today at All Saints and at every parish, more priestly ministry is happening than 50 years ago when the convents and rectories were full! Lay-people – ministers – are visiting the sick, bringing Communion to the homebound, teaching faith formation to children and adults, coordinating works of charity and social justice.

Emphasizing the “Priesthood of the Faithful” – that we all share – in no way minimizes the call to ordained ministry: deacon, presbyter and bishop, but calls all of us to use the gifts and talents God gives us to be in service to the community. Those called to ordination are called to servant leadership – *to serve the servants* of God.

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The recognition of the “Priesthood of the Faithful” has in so many ways set the Church on fire in proclaiming and living the Good News to the ends of the earth.

But as we know: 50-plus years after the Second Vatican Council , our Catholic Church is facing a major crisis in the continual decline in the number of ordained clergy available to serve the community as servant leaders.

We all know this – but here’s a local example: the Syracuse Diocese is divided into parish clusters called Pastoral Care Areas (PCA). All Saints is in PCA #10, which also includes the Cathedral, St. Lucy’s, Most Holy Rosary, St. Anthony’s, the new formed Our Lady of Hope (which is the merger of St. James and Our Lady of Lourdes) and Brady Faith Center. The Catholic Center at SU is not included because it is currently under the care of the Franciscan Friars.

Currently, a total of eight priests serve PCA #10. I’m 70 years old... and I’m the second youngest the group! The Diocese tells us that within five years, there at best be only three priests available to serve these parishes.

In the Syracuse Diocese and across the nation as well as many other parts of the world – up to now (as many of us would know) the most common method of dealing with the crisis has been to merge and close parishes. Since 2007 40 parishes have closed or merged. We all know that experience....

The good news is, our Diocese and others are beginning to realize that the continued closing of parishes is no longer – if it ever was – a viable option and that as we look toward the future, laypersons, religious and deacons will be leading parishes – while priests will be coordinating the sacramental needs of parishes, perhaps as a team. The Diocese of Syracuse is developing a program to train individuals as Parish Life Directors, who will – for all practical purposes – be the pastor of a parish. Parish Life Directors are already in place in a few areas of our Diocese. We'll be hearing much more about this.

Our Pastoral Council has formed a sub-committee to come up with a plan for our Parish so that we can continue to thrive into the future despite the priest shortage!

Let me make an analogy:

The Buildings and Grounds Committee, realizing that the boiler in the Bishop Harrison Center is the original – installed in 1957; conducted an engineering study to see how much life is left in the boiler so that we can proactively plan for replacement rather than having it break down and need replacement in the middle of the winter. We'll be hearing a lot more about this, but the study concluded that the boiler is well beyond its life expectancy and might have 1 – 5 years left – if we're lucky; but it could die tomorrow.

I'm a 70-year-old Priest; I'm functioning pretty well and am blessed by the grace of God with good health; and I have no plans to go anywhere from here; *but* I – just like that boiler – could drop dead tomorrow. The big difference with the analogy is that there is no boiler to replace me! Thus we need to prepare for lay leadership for the future. I deeply appreciate the Pastoral Council's prophetic leadership in preparing for the future of our All Saints Parish. In closing I'd like to share reflection from our Pope Francis' The Joy of the Gospel ¶ 28:

“The parish is not outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it proves capable of self-renewal constant adaptivity, it continues to be the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.”

Amen!