

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time – B
St. John the Baptist Catholic Church
February 5, 2012
All Masses – One Spirit – Many Gifts kick-off

There was a woman who went to an early Mass at her home parish on this Sunday, and heard her pastor preach on this gospel about the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. It wasn't a very inspiring sermon, so she decided to go to a later Mass that day at the neighboring parish. When she arrived, she discovered, to her dismay, that her pastor was filling in for that parish's priest, who was on retreat that weekend. She heard the same boring sermon. Thinking there was still time to redeem her Lord's Day experience, she went to the local hospital chapel where they had an evening Mass. You guessed it; her pastor was filling in there that evening for the hospital chaplain who was on vacation. The next morning, the woman was on the bus riding to work, and who should board the bus and sit next to her but her pastor. A hearse drove by, and the pastor said, "I wonder who died?" The woman couldn't help herself, and replied, "It must be Peter's mother-in-law. After Jesus healed her, she died of boredom listening to your sermon all day!"

Peter's mother-in-law, I think, is really the hero of this gospel passage. She teaches us so much about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and what it means to be a Christian steward. Notice the role of the community. Simon & Andrew, James & John "immediately told Jesus about her." That's what Christian community is all about. When you're a part of a Christian community, a parish, **people care about you**. They recognize your needs, and they help you to get the help you need. Then, she has an encounter with Jesus. Jesus "approached her, grasped her hand, and helped her up." That's what happens when a person meets Jesus. He/she is "touched" by Jesus, and healed. And then, as almost an afterthought, St. Mark tells us that "she waited on them." I think that's a most amazing thing! She doesn't just say, "Thank-you, Jesus," and go on with her life. She immediately starts serving the community. That's discipleship, that's stewardship.

This weekend is the kick-off for our **One Spirit – Many Gifts** stewardship initiative. This campaign is different from other campaigns. It's first of all a call to **discipleship**. Every parishioner will be invited to make a commitment in **five areas of stewardship**. But before we do that, we are challenged to reflect on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

We often hear about our favorite sports team, or maybe our “team” of employees at work, or an individual, “going to the next level,” and what it will take to “get to the next level.” What will it take for the Timberwolves, or the Vikings, or our high school team, to “get to the next level” of expertise and accomplishment.

I’d like to propose to our parish, “What does it mean, what will it take, for our parish to “get to the next level?” **One Spirit – Many Gifts** invites each of us to pledge in each of 5 areas of stewardship: What will it take to get to the next level in each of those areas?

First pledge – Prayer. Going to the next level might mean:

- Our Sunday Masses will be full – standing room only – not just on Christmas and Easter, but **every Sunday**. We’ll be looking at how we might **add a Mass** because our Masses are so full.
- It might mean: every hour of every day – there will be, not one, but at least **two or more** people praying in our Adoration Chapel.

Second pledge – Service. Going to the next level might mean:

- We will have a **waiting list** for volunteers for Families Moving Forward and other programs where we serve God’s people.
- We’ll have more than enough people who come forward to be confirmation small group leaders because people see how crucial it is to pass on the faith to our young people.
- Our respect life committee, and other groups will have to search for a larger room for their meetings because so many people want to offer their service.

Third pledge – Sunday giving. Going to the next level might mean:

- We are able to bring back some of the ministry positions we had to cut a few years ago.
- We can confidently pay our parish staff and school teachers just salaries for the quality work that they do.
- We can enhance the faith-building programs in our parish.

Fourth pledge – Capital giving. Going to the next level might mean:

- Our parish is totally debt-free in three years – **this is possible** – it is within our grasp.
- Did you know that if every St. John’s family gave **just one dollar per day** to the capital fund, our debt would be paid off in 3 years? But if we

just make our monthly payments, we will spend \$1.5 million **just in interest** by the time the debt is paid off.

Fifth and final pledge – Planned Giving. Going to the next level might mean:

- 10% of our parishioners would remember St. John’s in their estate planning.
- If even 10% did, it would go a long ways to keeping our parish financially sound.

So – what does this mean for you? If we, as a parish, want to “get to the next level,” then each and every one of us needs to commit to making a pledge in each of these areas. Each and every one of us needs to ask the question, “**What is the next level for me?**” Where am I at in my prayer? On the first day of my seminary studies, I remember being told that eventually, I should pray an hour a day. I thought to myself, “that’s impossible!” I wasn’t even praying 5 minutes every day consistently. Today, if I don’t pray an hour a day, I miss it; something is missing. But I didn’t get there in one day – it took years. So, if you’re praying **one minute a day**, try for two. If you’re getting to Mass once a month, try for twice a month. Wherever you are, try to go to the next level.

And the same for each of the categories of pledges. Where are you today? How can you stretch yourself to get to the next level? If every one of us does that, then, our parish as a whole will **get to the next level**, and be an even greater parish than we are now.

As a priest, I have been involved in many pledge campaigns over the years. I usually endure them, gritting my teeth. That’s not happening this time! I am excited about **One Spirit – Many Gifts**, and so are our leadership team and steering committee that have been prepping this campaign for several months now. I believe that **One Spirit – Many Gifts** is exactly what the Church is calling us to do to follow the mission given to us by Christ.

In the weeks to come, you will be invited to attend **One Spirit – Many Gifts** gatherings. A fantastic video will be shown about our parish, and the campaign will be explained in greater detail. You will be given a commitment packet to help you make your pledges in each of these five areas of stewardship. Let’s all look for how we can, as individuals and as a parish, move together to a **new level** of discipleship.