

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

If one of your friends would die and rise from the dead would you tell other people about him or her? If you would, you would be doing what we find the friends of Jesus doing in the scriptures after Jesus died and rose from the dead. For example, in the first reading today we find St. Peter telling the Jewish leaders, “We are witnesses of these things...” What kind of witness are you of your faith in Jesus Christ?

In his book, *The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*, the Catholic author, Matthew Kelly, lists “witnessing” as one of the four signs; the other three being prayer, learning and sharing. In the parish we speak of them as four characteristics of discipleship, that is, four ways of living out our faith on the parish level. Kelly admits however, that Catholics are uncomfortable witnessing to their faith. As a result, he says, it is the most underdeveloped of the four signs.

Kelly speaks of three ways of attracting people to Christ and his Church – three ways of witnessing. First friendship. He writes that “Christian friendship is not just about common interests; it is about helping each other become the best-version-of themselves.” Isn’t this what we want not just for our friends but for ourselves as well? There is a three-step process to witnessing as a friend: first make a friend; second, be a friend; and third, bring a friend to Christ.

The second way of witnessing is generosity. Christianity, by its very nature calls us to be generous in sharing our time, talent and treasure as well as our love and compassion. We see this played out in the gospel reading where we hear Jesus forgive his friend Peter who betrayed him three times. The generosity of forgiveness is a necessary part of any community.

The third way of witnessing is helping people find answers to their questions. Bishop Fulton Sheen, a popular TV personality back in the 1950s, wrote, “There are only one hundred people in the world who disagree with what the Church teaches. The rest disagree with what they think the Church teaches.” We need to help one another overcome our ignorance about our faith. We do this through prayer and learning.

In his book of the “Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic,” Kelly writes about “engaged Catholics.” He has discovered in his research over the years that roughly 7 percent of Catholic parishioners are doing almost everything in their faith community and paying almost entirely for the maintenance and mission of the parish. Even these “engaged” Catholics, he has found, tend to be more passive than active in their witnessing. He lists the top six ways that they witness:

1. Pass Catholic books and CDs around.
2. Invited people to Catholic events.
3. Bring a godly perspective to conversations.
4. Learn the Catholic teachings on certain issues and be able to articulate the when the Church is attacked over those issues in social settings.
5. Help people discover answers to the questions that cause them to doubt the Catholic faith.
6. Demonstrate the love of God through faithful and generous friendships.

Perhaps we could add on this first communion Sunday the witness of parents to their children in preparing them for the reception of both the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation?

In our message series this past Advent I introduced “Metro Mel” to you all. He is one of those who are somewhat disengaged with their faith. I challenge the members of the parish present here today to make Metro Mel welcomed at our weekend liturgies by acting as greeters and ushers, by making room for him in your pew by sitting in the middle and not the end of the pew, by cleaning up after yourself in the rest rooms, by inviting Metro Mel to share

food and drink with you after mass, and by serving food and drink after mass. These are all concrete ways, I believe, of witnessing. Hopefully those of you are visitors today have experienced our witnessing in the form of our hospitality?

The friends of Jesus two thousand years ago witnessed to their friendship with him. Are we willing to do the same?