

Father O'Connor's Homily for 14 January 2024
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

1 Samuel 3: 3b-10,19
1 Corinthians 6: 13c-15a, 17-20
John 1: 35-42

There was a poor, elderly lady who came to church every Sunday. She would really get into the sermon, periodically jumping up and hollering, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"

This annoyed some of the parishioners. So one chilly Sunday morning a group of them made a deal with her. If she would sit through the whole service without a single outburst, they would give her a brand-new electric blanket.

She took her usual spot, the service began, and the preacher got more and more wound up. And, unable to hold back, she jumped up and shouted, "Blanket or no blanket! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"

Now outbursts like that are unusual around here. But maybe, deep down inside, we might wish that we were so excited about our faith that we just couldn't resist sharing it with someone else.

That is what happened in today's Gospel. John the Baptist said to two of his disciples, as Jesus was walking by, "Behold, the Lamb of God." And they immediately followed Jesus and spent the day with Him. One of them was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. He went home and told his brother, "We have found the Messiah." And then he brought Simon Peter to Jesus.

There are folks just like Andrew – "the Andrew people" – who just can't keep the message of Jesus to themselves, but go out enthusiastically inviting others to follow Him.

Very often we find in Church life that new converts to the faith bring that enthusiasm to the rest of us who have been around for a while. And how did they get here in the first place? So many will tell you about "the Andrew people" that invited them to "come and see." And so they did – and now here they are!

There was a beautiful old church in a downtown area. A once-thriving church, its membership was now seriously declining, and the parishioners kept pretty much to themselves.

One night a fire broke out and the church was seriously damaged. Afterwards they began sorting out what could be salvaged. One item was a marble statue of Jesus with His hands extended in welcome. They put it outside on the

sidewalk, for the time being. Then someone, walking by, saw the statute and said, “Well, it looks like Jesus is finally out with the people!”

That is an important lesson: that we take the faith that we nourish here in the church and carry it through those doors to the world. That we “go and announce the Gospel of the Lord,” as the dismissal form that we use today at the end of Mass charges us. This was Jesus’ “great commission” to us just before He ascended into heaven to be seated at His Father’s right hand: “Go and make disciples.” In other words, “Go and be ‘Andrew people.’”

It takes two virtues to be “Andrew people.” It takes faith: that we have met the Master and believe in Him. And it takes love: that we want to go out and share what we have received with others. It takes both.

There is a favorite story that I have lodged in my archives. And, although I love this story, it is very difficult for me to tell, as you will likely soon see. But it illustrates so well this point about faith and love that I thought that I would risk what it takes to tell it, and leave it with you today for your reflection.

It is about a fourth-grade teacher, Miss Thompson. Miss Thompson was the kind of teacher that every parent hopes their child will have. She prided herself on her effectiveness and her consistency. And then she met her match.

There was a student in her class that year by the name of Teddy Stollard. As the school year progressed, Miss Thompson came to dislike Teddy. As a devout Christian woman, she was ashamed to admit that she even enjoyed giving him his Ds and Fs.

She knew Teddy’s background. He entered first grade as a bright boy with lots of promise. His mother became seriously ill when he was in the second grade, and she died when he was in the third grade. His father was trying to do the best that he could, but Teddy was struggling. Miss Thompson knew all this, but still had a dislike for Teddy and the way he behaved.

It was the last day of school before Christmas break and the students brought in their gifts for Miss Thompson and placed them on her desk before class began. There was one gift, though, that caused some of the students to laugh and make fun of. It was crudely wrapped in aluminum foil, and it stood out.

Miss Thompson, the veteran teacher that she was, saw what was going on and, to save the day, went over and picked up that gift, and saw that it was from Teddy Stollard. She opened it and inside was a small bottle of cheap perfume. And the kids all started laughing again.

So she opened the perfume bottle and put some on her wrist and said to her class, “Oh, my. Smell this on my wrist. Doesn’t it smell good?” And the oohs and aahs began. Then Miss Thompson put it aside and went on with the school day.

After school she was gathering her belongings at her desk when she noticed a shadow in the doorway. It was Teddy. And he said, “Miss Thompson, did you like my gift? That was my mother’s perfume. And now you smell just like my mother.”

Miss Thompson said that this was the moment that changed her life. There was a brand-new relationship born between her and Teddy. She took a personal interest in him and she helped him grow and excel.

Some years later she received an invitation to attend Teddy’s high school graduation, and she went. Four years after that, she got an invitation to his college graduation, signed Theodore Stollard. And years later she received an invitation to his graduation from medical school, signed Dr. Theodore Stollard.

And then one day she received a wedding invitation with this hand-written note inside: “Miss Thompson, after my mother died, you became a very special person in my life. I would be honored if you would sit in the place in church where my mother would have sat for my wedding.”

I tell you this story, so full of emotion that it is hard to tell, but easy to picture and remember, because there are people in the world like this. They are good, good people. They are “the Andrew people.”

God bless “the Andrew people” who with faith have met their Master, and with love invite other people to know and love Him too. They “go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” They “go and make disciples.”

When I look around our parishes, and this church today, there are lots of folks right, just like that: “the Andrew people.”

And taking another risk, standing here on my feet, I am willing to say, “Blanket or no blanket! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!”