

Dynamic Catholic Sunday October 6, 2013

“Stir into flame the gift of God that you have, which is within you.” Saint Paul writes this because the **embers were going out in people’s lives** and he asks **us** to stir up the flames of God’s gift within us, the gift of faith in the power of God in our lives.

In his recent interview, Pope Francis reminds us about this gift: the gift of the saving message of Jesus Christ. The primary work of the Church is to proclaim Jesus and his saving power. It is an invitation to know a loving and merciful God who meets us where we are and then leads us to deeper faith and truth.

In the interview Pope Francis describes himself as a *sinner*. It reminded me that Saint Peter said the same thing about himself when he said to Jesus **“Leave me Lord for I am a sinful man.”** (Luke 5: 8) But Jesus did not leave Peter. He drew him in closer. Jesus wants to draw us closer to Himself, even though we are sinners, imperfect disciples.

This makes the Church is a hospital that heals us from sin and all that wounds us in life. Church is a hospital for ongoing recovery.

The church should be attractive, appealing, engaging. Not watered-down but authentic and filled with a desire to know, love and serve God and to be with Him for eternity in heaven.

But many Catholics need to stir up the flames of faith; to rekindle the fire and revive the embers that are turning cold.

Some of us are more engaged and others are not very engaged in the church or in a life of prayer, in a daily walk with Jesus.

Saint Paul wrote to the Philippians (3:1-16) **“I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection.**

The power of the resurrection in our lives is the power of God triumphing over our despair, our sins, our fears, our being lukewarm or disengaged. It is about a relationship with Jesus, not a theory or philosophy, but the Living God.

The Good News of Jesus brings us hope, consolation, kindness, healing, generosity, forgiveness, peace, justice, conversion, reconciliation, prayer and the promise of eternal life. When people think of the Catholic Church these are words that should define us. These are the graces that bring people to Jesus and the Church.

Recently, Matthew Kelly wrote a book to encourage Catholics to become more engaged, more faith-filled. It is titled **The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic**.

He studied a series of parishes from coast to coast checking out volunteerism and financial contributions.

He discovered that only 7% of registered parishioners contribute 80% of the volunteer hours and 80% of the financial contributions in a parish.

He also discovered that the remaining 93% of parish members are disengaged!

He noted that the 7% makes a huge impact in the world.... feeding the hungry, housing, clothing more people, caring for the sick, [operating hospitals and clinics] visiting the imprisoned and educating more students than any other institution in the world.

So, if 7% make this great impact in the world, just imagine what 14% could do. Or 21%? It would change the world.

So Kelly asks the question: What makes the 7% different? **What do the 7% do, think, and believe** that is different from what the 93% do, think, and believe?

He narrowed it down to this: the 7% pray, study, are generous, and evangelize. These are the four signs, the four practices, that a dynamic Catholic possesses: prayer, study, generosity and evangelization.

He writes that the 7% are not perfect. The 7% can forget how they had been far away from God. And now can be somewhat judgmental toward the less engaged.

So even the 7% have room to grow.

But Matthew Kelly calls the 7% “dynamic.”

They are lively, active, self-motivated, energetic, vibrant, full of life, enthusiastic.

Of course, this would indicate that the 93% in the pews are not so dynamic. They might be weary, or apathetic, indifferent, uninterested or unconcerned.

So what makes a Catholic “dynamic, energetic, vibrant and enthusiastic?”

How do they get that way? How do they experience Jesus in their lives?

First, Kelly says that the most dominant quality among the 7% -- those who are Dynamic Catholics -- is a daily routine of **prayer**.

But when I ask people if they pray daily, most say NO. I am surprised at how many people in the pews on Sunday do not pray during the week. They have no routine of prayer.

Yet, most of us eat three meals daily that could be 21 meals a week for physical nourishment, but we don't save all 21 meals to eat in one day. Neither should we save all of our prayers for one day: Sunday. We need spiritual nourishment each day. We need conversation with Jesus every day.

When you set aside time for daily prayer and make it a priority, this will be a great game changer in your life. You will be surprised how prayer makes an incredible impact on your daily life.

I know, as Kelly says, that my days are much easier and less stressful and more productive, when I spend more time in prayer. It seems *counter intuitive*: it seems like we lose work time if we take time to pray. But with prayer, our time is more productive.

The 93% who are disengaged Catholics may pray but it tends to be spontaneous and inconsistent.

The 7% have a daily commitment to prayer, a routine, a discipline. Prayer is a priority for them with some structure, whether it is daily Mass, praying the rosary, reading the Bible, or sitting down in a big, comfortable chair or taking a walk. But they have regular daily conversations with God. And that is prayer. The 7% have a plan. Prayer is not left to chance or mood (p 19).

The 7% start by simply talking to God about their day. They are not saints. With much trial and error they develop their lives of prayer.

Today I am asking each of you to consider where you are.

I am asking each person to just take one small step.

If you do not pray, if you are part of the 93%, then start to pray just one minute a day. Make one small step at a time. Start by just talking with God about your day. Then add a minute each day.

There are holy cards available at the doors of the church that have the 7 steps for the Prayer Process that can help you to pray.

For Kelly the sign of a dynamic Catholic begins with Prayer; and then Study, Generosity, and Evangelization.

When we embrace these four practices, then in a short period of time you can be transformed from a disengaged Catholic into a highly engaged Catholic. “Little by little we can change lives from disappointment and discouragement to hope and engagement. And this can change not only us, but our parish and the world. Little by little.” (p 34)

Today we are kicking off our Dynamic Catholic series to engage you. We are offering Matthew Kelly’s book *for free* to all parishioners.

They are available one per family in the courtyard. Take one to read. Kelly’s CD that overviews the book is also available. When you finish reading it, pass the book or CD on to a friend or family member. Prayer cards with the 7 steps for the Prayer Process are also available at the doors.

Our goals are very modest: To stir into flame the gift of God in us. I invite you to join other parish members on this journey of faith.

By now I imagine that you have surmised whether you are part of the 7% or the 93%!!

But do not be hesitant or embarrassed about where you are in your prayer life. We are all in the same river, going in the same direction, but in different boats and at different speeds. But let’s all be in a boat heading toward a more engaged life of faith.

Jesus reminds us that all we need to do is ask: **“Increase our faith!”** With faith the size of a mustard seed God can do great things. My prayer for each of you and for myself and our parish is that Jesus will increase our faith so that we may each become even more dynamic, more engaged in our faith.

If you are young or old, male or female, left, right or middle of the road, part of the 93% or part of the 7% the four signs --- prayer, study, generosity and evangelization --- can be part of everyone’s life.

Imagine for a moment if everyone in our parish did these four things:

- 1) Spent at least 10 minutes a day in prayerful conversation with God (PRAYER)
- 2) Read 5 pages of a great Catholic book each day (STUDY)
- 3) Gave 1% more of their income to support the mission of our parish than they did last year (GENEROSITY)
- 4) Did one thing each week to share the genius of Catholicism with someone else. (EVANGELIZATION)

How could our parish be different in one year? After 10 years?

As a start, whether you are part of the 7% or 93%, come to the first presentation on Prayer this Wednesday night in the Parish Hall. Invite a friend. It will give you a better understanding of the power and importance of prayer. It can be the beginning of being a dynamic Catholic and jump start your prayer life.

You can attend some or all of the presentations!

Ultimately we want to stir into flames the embers of our faith. We want Jesus to increase our faith. We want each of us as Catholics to be really in touch with the power of the Gospel. We each want peace, pardon, truth, healing, and hope in our lives. We want to be engaged with Jesus and the Church.

This year if just another 1% of our parish members embraced the four signs, we would see a wonderful difference in the life of our parish. And it all starts with prayer. Give it a chance!

With the psalmist we pray: "If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts." +++

NOTES

Many people may think “I am happy just the way I am....sitting back with my familiar habits, good or bad, and God and I are just fine, thank you very much!”

But many of them have not ever experienced a deeper life of prayer and the difference it make sin their daily lives. How it can overcome laziness, anger, impatience, judgments, despair, fear,..

Imagine for a moment if everyone in our parish did these four things:

- 5) Spent 10 minutes a day in prayerful conversation with God (PRAYER)
- 6) Read 5 pages of a great Catholic book each day (STUDY)
- 7) Gave 1% more of their income to support the mission of our parish than they did last year (GENEROSITY)
- 8) Did one thing each week to share the genius of Catholicism with someone else. (EVANGELIZATION)

How could our parish be different in one year? After 10 years?

The four signs are interrelated.

For example:

If you read 5 pages of a good Catholic book each day (Study), your prayer life would no doubt improve (Prayer), you would be more likely to talk with others about the ideas you are reading about (Evangelization) and the more you know God and his Church the more likely you are to be generous with God and neighbor (Generosity).

Matthew Kelly sets very modest goals! We are only looking for 1% of our parish to move from the 93% to the 7% group.

1% of those nearly 2000 people who attend Mass in English each weekend would be transforming just 20 people into highly engaged members this year. But imagine the difference.... the incredible outreach, service and spiritual development of the parish.

And when this happens each year, then in 7 years 14% of our parish will be more engaged. This is the game changer that can change the world 1% at a time.

Conclusion:

- 1) Prayer: Dynamic Catholics have a daily commitment to prayer
- 2) Study: Dynamic Catholics are continuous learners
- 3) Generosity: Dynamic Catholics are generous
- 4) Evangelization: Dynamic Catholics invite other to grow spiritually by sharing the love of God with them.