

Bread for the World WEEK FOUR August 29, 2021

Last week I had lunch with Sherrie Wade who is a member of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Damascus MD.

Sherrie coordinates their Honduras ministry, which St. Pius has supported for several years.

Now, the story of how this ministry began is incredibly inspiring.

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras.

7,000 people died, tens of thousands of homes were destroyed and economic development was set back fifty years.

A young woman named Joanny Medrano, who grew up in Honduras and was a parishioner at St. Paul's, turned to her church family for help with hurricane relief.

SCREEN: Joanny Medrano pic

Here's a picture of Joanny - that's her in the red shirt.

The easiest thing for St. Paul's to do would have been to take up a collection - a one-and-done response.

They decided to do more because the need was so great.

Within a year, they had established a medical clinic in the capital of Tegucigalpa that now operates year round.

And twice a year, a group of volunteers from our area - including doctors, nurses and dentists - travel to Honduras for a week of service.

I've joined them three times and plan to return when travel resumes.

So many things about this story inspire me:

- Joanny's passion and determination,
- the vision of the leaders at St. Paul's to see what could be done,
- and the generous response from so many individuals.

They all saw people hurting in another part of the world and decided, *these are our brothers and sisters and we must help them.*

SCREEN: Be doers of the word and not hearers only

They were practicing what St. James wrote in our second reading today:

being doers of the word and not hearers only.

All great churches do this when they decide to be outwardly not inwardly focused.

Our own parish does this beautifully in so many ways - ways that you hear about all the time.

Whether its making sandwiches for SOME, a soup kitchen in DC, donating groceries for our Sharing Pantry,

supporting Habitat for Humanity,

addressing racial injustice,

helping the people of Haiti or Honduras,

or refugees from Afghanistan -

we do these things because our faith demands it.

And while no one can do everything,

everyone can *AND MUST* do something.

SCREEN: Bread for the World main screen

We've come to the final week of our message series titled, Bread for the World.

This series began with Jesus telling his disciples that he is the bread come down from heaven.

He said that any who would follow him must eat his body and drink his blood.

Last week we heard that those words so upset many of his followers that they decided to leave him.

But the apostles remained.

They were with Jesus at the Last Supper when he gave them the Eucharist.

They received his Body and Blood.

The next day, when Jesus died on the cross, they finally understood the depth of God's love.

And then the gift of the Holy Spirit empowered them to take Jesus's message out to others.

They became bread for the world.

As we conclude this series, we focus on what it means for us to be bread for the world today.

SCREEN: blank red background

Let's get started.

In today's Gospel we heard that some Pharisees and scribes had traveled from Jerusalem because they'd heard that Jesus might be the messiah. So they were on a pretty important mission.

But rather than focus on Jesus's parables or miracles, the Pharisees got sidetracked.

They zeroed in on how the Apostles washed their hands before dinner.

Now, this was not about hygiene.

This was about the ritual, religious washing of the hands which Jewish law required.

Jesus was constantly at odds with the religious leaders of his day.

And that's because it's clear that they lost sight of what faith in God is all about.

The Pharisees decided that faith was all about rules and regulations - and they had over 600 of them.

And all those do's and don'ts blinded them to God's presence, to the point that they couldn't even see the messiah standing right before them.

In responding to their attacks on his followers,

Jesus quoted the Prophet Isaiah:

SCREEN: This people honors me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me;

in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.

He said, *"You disregard God's commandment but cling to human tradition."*

Jesus's point is that faith has to be more than rules.

Rules and commandments aren't bad - they're necessary.

They can be great!

But they become harmful when they blind a person to love of God and love of neighbor, which Jesus said are the greatest commandments.

We can all be like the Pharisees at times, getting sidetracked or distracted with things that are picky or minor.

This can happen in our relationships with loved ones.

We let a disagreement over how to clean a room or load a dishwasher ruin a perfectly good evening.

At work or school we waste endless amounts of time on office politics and gossip that are harmful and destructive.

It can even happen with our faith when we fail to see the face of God in the people around us -

when we become blind to the needs of others or decide their problems are not my problem.

SCREEN: Be doers of the word and not hearers only

Be doers of the word and not hearers only.

I wonder if the Apostle James was remembering

Jesus's encounter in today's Gospel when he wrote this?

Remembering Jesus's warning not to pay God lip service, but to live the faith instead?

The most important way for you and I to be bread for the world is to take what we receive at Mass -

God's Word and Christ's Eucharist and share it with others.

To be outwardly, not inwardly focused.

It's how we become great in God's eyes.

And it's the best way to avoid the trap of the Pharisees who honored God with their lips, while their hearts were far from him.

So how can you be "bread for the world"?

Well, it begins by having the right attitude.

SCREEN: take on the attitude of Christ

And for disciples, that means having the attitude of Christ.

Jesus's earthly ministry was dedicated to alleviating the suffering of others.

He fed the hungry, healed the sick, forgave sinners, and comforted the sorrowing.

He also reached out to the foreigner, the outcast and

those on the margins of society.

Jesus truly loved his neighbor as himself and said to his followers,

“As I have done, so you also must do.”

And his greatest act of love was to give his life

to save humanity - he sacrificed himself on the cross for others.

When you follow his example and commit to loving others as Jesus did

you become bread for the world.

SCREEN: share hope

Another important way you and I can be bread for the world

is by being people who share hope with others.

And our world can use more hope right now.

In the face of war and natural disasters, violence and hatred,

we can easily feel overwhelmed and give in to negativity.

Disciples must be people of hope who share hope with others.

Decide that you will spread hope by not gossiping

or tearing down or passing along anything that is negative or hurtful.

Take time to value the people you might otherwise dismiss -

your family and friends, coworkers and classmates, neighbors and

even strangers.

SCREEN: help the hurting

And finally, do whatever you can to help the hurting.

Which might mean you need to open

your eyes and heart a little wider to see people in need.

Then, when you hear of opportunities to help - whether it's

Honduras or Haiti or Bowie or DC - dig down deep to do whatever you can.

If you aren't sure where to start, check out our bulletin

or watch the screen announcements at the end of this Mass

and then do one thing this week to help someone in need.

SCREEN: Bread for the World main screen

For those who follow Christ,

the only unacceptable option is to do nothing.

That's not an option.

Today as we conclude this message series,
let us never lose sight of Christ the Bread of Life.

And let us redouble our efforts in sharing our faith with others
that we may be bread for the world. Amen. +