

The Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time July 3, 2022

God sends us wherever people can be found. In Jesus' day, people would gather in marketplaces and in town squares. So, that is where He sent His disciples to proclaim the good news. Our world today is very different. There are not many places where people gather and where they would be comfortable having a stranger approach them. Thankfully, technology has provided us with other ways to reach people. The most recent way has been through the internet.

One person who is using his talents and technical skills to reach out to young people with the love of Jesus Christ is Johnathan Blevins. And he is doing it in a way that might seem strange and unusual to many of us, but is proving to work well. He uses his skill at playing video games to first get young people's attention and then speak to them about his Catholic faith.

Some of you might remember that when video games first came out, you'd have to go to a large arcade to play them. Now, anyone can play them on their computers. Not only that, you can actually go on to your computer and watch other people play video games. In some ways, it's similar to watching a baseball or football game. Even if you like to play the game yourself, it is entertaining to watch highly skilled players compete.

Johnathan is skillful enough that people tune into his online channel called "Bearded Blevins" to watch him compete against other players. He uses it as an opportunity to model good sportsmanship to young people and also share his faith. At the end of the game, he offers to pray for those who have tuned in to watch him.

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When asked about how he gets young people to open up to him, he said: "We aren't hosting teaching sessions and lecturing people. Faith comes up naturally after viewers have already begun to trust us because we are friendly and loving. Then when they inevitably ask questions about faith or life in general, they are very open to whatever we have to say. The number one comment we get from people is 'wow, I have never heard someone share faith in such a loving non-confrontational way.'"

Johnathan teaches us that no matter what our talents may be, we can use them to witness to our faith. And anywhere we go as Christians can be a place where we can proclaim the love of God.

Just think about all the places you go on any given day. It could be your school, your office, the dry-cleaner, the grocery store, the gas station, or any number of places. How many people do you meet there? How many people do you talk to? Any of those encounters can be an opportunity to share our faith. Even just telling someone that we will pray for them can open their hearts to Jesus' love.

In today's gospel, Jesus sends seventy-two disciples out to the villages and towns He intends to visit. He gives them a few instructions before they head off to proclaim the good news. Since all of us are called to witness to our faith, let us take a closer look at how we can apply that advice to our own lives.

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The first thing is that Jesus is sending the disciples ahead of Him to places that He Himself intended to visit. They would be preparing the way for Jesus. They will preach and teach, but Jesus will eventually come to seal the deal. That is important for us to remember. We don't have to have all the answers. We don't necessarily have to convince anyone. We simply have to tell people about our own faith and let God do the rest. If we can answer their questions along the way, then great. Otherwise, we can trust that Jesus will eventually visit them with His grace. We cannot change anyone, only Jesus can.

Secondly, Jesus tells us to pray that the Father will send workers into His vineyard. Prayer is powerful. Our prayers really can move hearts. All our work should have as its first step a life of intense prayer asking God to send workers into His vineyard, that He send us, and that He open the hearts of those we meet to the message of His love.

Thirdly, Jesus urges us to keep it simple. He tells His disciples not to take too many things along with them but to trust that God will provide them with what they need. We see an example of this in Johnathan's story. He didn't put together an elaborate program to evangelize young people. He simply started with something that came natural to him - video gaming - and used it as an opportunity to share his faith. The same can be true for us. If you have a talent for coaching, you can simply use it to be an example to young people of good sportsmanship and the importance of discipline. If you are a naturally friendly person, you can invite people to events at the parish and introduce them to other parishioners to give them a sense of belonging. God can use any of our talents and abilities to draw other people to him.

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Finally, Jesus talks about the importance of hospitality. He urges His disciples to graciously accept the hospitality of those they are sent to preach to. In the same way, He is inviting us to offer hospitality to people in our homes and in our parish. There are so many lonely people who could use a place to go when they are feeling sad. There are so many young people who would benefit from knowing a stable family. Are our homes places where we welcome people? Is our parish a place where people have a sense of belonging and community? If not, what can we do to change that?

If we have been touched by Jesus Christ - if we have come to know Him and His love for us - it will show in the way we speak and the way we act. If the love of Jesus is alive in our hearts, we will want to share it with others. It does not have to be complicated. It is simply a matter of befriending others and telling them what our faith means to us. Then we can trust that Jesus will take care of the rest.