

April 14/15 Reflection by Dottie Farewell

Good Evening/Morning

Each year, our CYO Athletics program starts out in the fall with two sports: Soccer and Cross Country. Both sports offer competition for girls and boys in grades kindergarten thru 8th grade, but soccer—with almost 400 participants and dozens of volunteer coaches—usually gets a lot of the focus and attention; On the other hand, cross country is about one-fourth the size, but has a committed and competitive group of hard-working students and coaches.

This past fall, at the CYO Cross Country championship races at Woodland Park, something extraordinary happened...during the 8th grade boys race, one of our runners—JR—was neck and neck with a boy from another school in the final stretch of the race—they were fighting for the final spot on the podium. Suddenly, the other racer tripped and fell just before crossing the finish line. JR stopped, turned around and reached down to pull him up as two other boys passed them by....as one of the coaches later wrote in an email: “What I witnessed has me feeling so so proud of the community that we’re clearly fostering at St. Joe’s...”

Hearing this story, it’s easy to see how selfless JR’s actions were, but there’s another part of the story..that of the email I received which bore witness to his heroism/charity.

As Christians, we work to do the good work/to act charitably when given the opportunity, but we also are called to witness our faith—testify to our beliefs—and pass these on to those around us. Indeed, faith is not insular, not meant to be kept to ourselves—to hold close and foster in a cocoon-- but to understand that “my” faith cannot or should not be separated from “our” faith. We are called to be more than spectators, but witnesses.

In today’s Gospel, the disciples meet Jesus after the resurrection—his flesh and bone and appetite is real, not imagined or ethereal—he is not a ghost. Jesus has risen from the dead. They experience the resurrected Jesus, but things do not stop there—the disciples are called to action... They are called to take responsibility...the responsibility as Jesus says, to testify—to tell, to preach, to witness! (pause)

Jesus sends us the advocate; to inspire us to become witnesses. We have been given our faith tradition—passed down through generations from witnesses who came before us—to believe what the disciples themselves experienced and believed: that through Jesus’ “suffering, and rising from the dead and repentance for the forgiveness of sins”

comes the salvation of the world. And just as the disciples had been told to do—we are now entrusted to spread this Good news to the world.

Last month, Pope Francis published the apostolic exhortation “Rejoice and Be Glad” on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World. In this document, Pope Francis invites us to reflect on our call to Holiness. We share in the Lord’s call to not just experience Christ but to bear witness to Christ in the world. As Pope Francis writes: “The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts, rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them.” (Para. 11).

Personally, I’m finding myself challenged as to how to witness my faith in community. How do I allow your faith to feed me and how does my faith feed you? How can my personal discernment or experience ignite the living spirit in this community? This can be a scary thing—there is a great vulnerability, a need for trust and acceptance—that goes along with opening yourself to others. But I don’t have to look far to see this cloud of witnesses around me:

- I see these babies ready for baptism and their parents taking those first steps in the responsibility of raising their children in this faith. That they trust our community—St. Joseph’s Church—is a great gift to all of us.
- I see adolescents like Zalie, Ruby, Josie, Gracie, Mary, Annie and Sarah witnessing their gifts and faith by supporting our community through service every week. They get up early on Sunday mornings to come and volunteer in the classrooms or help usher or lector. They are witnessing to us the work it takes to care for our growing church.
- I see young adults like Erin who grew up in this parish—as a student, she took on a variety of responsibilities such as altar serving and ushering and participating in youth group—who came back to help the faith formation and youth group programs that nurtured and fostered her faith. She witnesses to this community the love and service she received so generously.
- I see Monica who has been teaching our First Communicants in Sunday school for over 15 years. Having been graced with a generous heart and spirit, she witnesses to our children the gifts of learning about reconciliation and receiving Eucharist for the first time.
- I see Doreen—who will most likely not be happy I’ve included her—but whose witness I must include! A wise woman filled with innumerable gifts, who returned to

teach and witness the faith to our young parishioners and who fills the class with creativity and wonder each week.

Each of these women represents something simply extraordinary that is perhaps especially true in today's culture: by the power of their witness, they are transforming our community. Pope Francis stresses that the "genius of woman" is seen in feminine styles of holiness: "Indeed, in times when women tended to be mostly ignored or overlooked, the Holy Spirit raised up saints whose attractiveness produced new spiritual vigor and important reforms in the church." Saints such as St. Hildegard, St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Theresa of Avilla, and St. Therese of Lisieux.

Male or female, well known or anonymous, all of us are called to witness. As a married mother of two young boys, I know men in this community who bear witness just as these women have. Our community's responsibility--our ability to embrace and testify to God's love and generosity and presence in our lives--involves all of us.

We are all called to witness: to tell our stories, to weave our personal narratives into the fabric of this community—from generation to generation—this is what we give to these babies today and what we are called by Christ to do for each other every day of our lives.