

Sermon: September 6, 2009

**“Joanna Angelica”**

Maybe you saw in the Sun-Times this past week ... a big article about the Catholic Church’s campaign to get people to come back to church. So, I’m at the Riviera the other day ... in my continuing quest to be “fit” ... and I see my buddy “FATHER JOHN.” John is a Catholic priest ... as goofy as the day is long ... and a wonderful man. He calls me the “Lutheran monsignor.”

“Hey, Don ... did you see the news about us? ... we’re trying to get people back to church!@!!”

“Yes, John ... you are always a step ahead of us. Please ... save a few of your left-overs for us.”

Thinking about people “getting back” to church.

One of the most “depressing” days of the month for me is when we send out the newsletter. I mean --- we send out 500 of these puppies ... and most of the people to whom we send it ... well, they never darken the door of the church. So, I enter this moment of “self-doubt” ... wondering what I’m doing wrong. But ... like the flu ...

I get over it and move on.

Then ... in my more lucid moments ... I realize ... it’s ok.

Life is not about “going to church.” Life is about LIFE ... period. It’s about how you walk ... how you live ... whether or not you are a good person ... what you do with what you have.

And ... going to church? ... well, it’s kind-of like frosting on the cake!!

Martin Luther didn’t like the New Testament book of JAMES ... he called it the “straw epistle.” Why? ---- well, Luther was big on being saved only thru “faith” .... salvation is about what you believe ... not the “good works” you try to do. But ... the author of “James” makes it clear ----- FAITH, WITHOUT WORKS, IS DEAD. Let’s say you meet someone who is hungry. You tell that person ... “go in peace” ... but you don’t give him anything to eat ... now ----- what good is that!!

You can go to mass everyday ...

You can come here every Sunday ...

You can “study” the Bible non-stop ...

You can say and believe all the “right things” ...

BUT ... IN LIFE ... *if you don’t do “good stuff” ... it’s all for naught.*

Life ... is about life.

As usual ... we, as the church, have it backwards.

I think of the effort to bring the “un-churched” back into the fold.

I think of the 2 religious broadcasts I listen to early Sunday morning ... which basically are selfish efforts to get people to go to their church!!

And now I realize ----- we don’t need to get people back to the church ...

***we need to get the church back into the lives of people!!***

Think about it. Ideally ... we, the church ----- we are called to be the body of Christ.

Ideally ... in the way we walk ... in the way we go about our business ... in how we use the gifts we have ... our use of our time, our use of our money, the way we handle life’s unexpected moments ...

how we care for a loved-one who is sick ...

how we re-act when someone we love screws-up ...

when we are the victims of injustice ... or someone we care about is ...

WHEN PEOPLE LOOK AT US ... WHEN PEOPLE ARE AROUND US ...

well, they should be able to see and feel the spirit of Jesus!!

It needs to be in us ... “the body of Christ” needs to be in the very fiber of our being.

In the gospel for today ... what does Jesus do?

He meets a lady whose daughter is “possessed by a demon.” My guess is ... many of you have “daughters possessed by demons”!@!! Oh, well ...

Is her daughter depressed? ...mean? ... troubled and lonely????

Who knows ----- but Jesus touches her ... he embraces her ... he loves her ...  
and the demon eventually leaves!!

Jesus then meets a man who can't speak or hear. Now ... we can view this as just another miracle story ...or ---  
we can see ourselves in this.

How many times have I been unwilling to hear the truth ... about myself or my world????

How many times have I been unwilling to speak the truth ... when someone else deserves to hear it????

This is our mission ... this is our calling ----- to confront the demons of the world head-on.

To open peoples' eyes ... to have the courage to speak.

My Lordy, my Lordy ..... if more people could see the “power of Jesus” in each of us ...

if we could just exemplify how Jesus walked and talked ...

we wouldn't have to worry about the church ... **THE JOINT WOULD BE FULL BEYOND MEASURE!!**

We have a good place here ... we are a good church ...

but ----- the REAL CHURCH begins when we walk out the door.

On Wednesday night ... we will “officially say good-bye” to a lady whose very life was embedded in the church. Yes ... she got a bit “goofy” around garage sale time .... but her faith, her church family ----- it was her rock and her life.

When Gladie heard that she would probably have to spend her remaining days in a “nursing home” ... she was depressed and mortified ... until she met ----- **the angel network** ... symbolized by a lady we came to know as **JOANNA ANGELICA**.

No two people could look different or have more different backgrounds.

Gladie ----- thin as a pencil, white, Chicago born ...

Joanna ----- strong, black, much of her family still in the homeland of Kenya.

Words can't adequately express it ... but Joanna ----- *she exudes the goodness & grace of Jesus!!*

Her smile ... her gentleness ... her spiritual connection to someone who started-out as a stranger ...

she and Gladie became *sisters in the Lord*.

Joanna and her team-mates in the ANGEL NETWORK ... well, they helped Gladie's transition from this world to the next be a **journey of beauty and goodness.**

The church is YOU.

The church is ME.

The church is US-TOGETHER.

The church is an “angel” on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of Alden ... the church is wherever the light of Jesus shines in the darkness. The church is a “full piggy bank” ... in a world that often feels empty.

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