

The fourth of July is one holiday it's hard to mess up. You don't have to worry about what to wear--any t-shirt, any pair of shorts will do. The entertainment is easy: you don't have to light fireworks; you just have to find the big display. Even the cooking doesn't require much skill: If you can open a bag of potato chips, pop the top on soft drinks, and scoop out ice cream, you're home free. It's nice to have a holiday you can succeed at so easily.

It's nice to have anything you can succeed at easily. This is why the disciples were so jubilant at the end of their first day's work. They cured the sick, they made new friends, demons fled at their command--and they did it all without spending a single traveler's check. It was a picnic.

But Jesus says, "Whoa. Don't just rejoice over your power; rejoice that your names are inscribed in heaven." In a way this seems crazy--if things are working well, why shouldn't we rejoice in them? But perhaps Jesus gave this advice for those times when things don't work so well--those times when we meant to do the right thing but it all came untangled: one day work becomes a nightmare, a friend misunderstands what we said, or the potato chips spill on the ground in the middle of the picnic. When we mean to do well, but we fail, it's hard to rejoice over our power, but we might rejoice that our names are still inscribed in heaven.

The basic work the disciples do here is something we've come to call evangelization, bringing the Gospel to those who have not heard it or applied it to their lives. This word has many different meanings: In the catechumenate, evangelization refers to the stage before people decide if they want to join the Catholic Church. In some Christian Churches evangelization means knocking on the doors of strangers to ask if they've heard of Jesus Christ. It can mean that for us, too. But evangelization has two basic meanings: Telling the Gospel to people who have never heard it before, or reminding people who have heard the Gospel that now they should make decisions based on it. Pope Paul VI said the church should even evangelize itself. We need to ask ourselves are we making decisions based on the Gospel.

I thought about this last week when the Catholic bishops of the United States met at Notre Dame to discuss the pastoral letter they're writing on the role of women in the church. Have you followed the news on this? First you have a group of men writing a document about women. Then, it's clear the church has excluded women from leadership for years. Some say that's sinful; others say that's inspired. The resulting document pleases no one, but through it all we evangelize ourselves: Are we being faithful to Gospel? Can we rejoice that our names are written in heaven?

Life is no picnic. On the days it's hard to succeed we may need to evangelize ourselves a little harder. On the days life is a picnic, open up another bag of chips, and thank God for the small successes that keep us going till the day we read our names among those inscribed in heaven.