

I recently visited with a couple who are 50-ish, just like the parish here. They have three children and in the space of a year, one got an apartment, one got married and the other is joining the service. So they're emptying the house all at once. The mother said to me, "I'm not angry, I'm just not ready for them all to leave yet. I feel like I haven't finished my job as a parent, and now I can't do it."

Maybe you've had that feeling where you have so much work you want to finish, yet you know somehow you won't get the chance to do it.

That's the feeling that marks the appearance of Jesus in today's Gospel. This is a story that takes place after the resurrection. The disciples are gathered together, and Jesus mysteriously appears to them. He looks like a ghost, but they can see his wounds. He has died, yet he's hungry and eats a piece of cooked fish. Now, I tell you, if you ever need to get someone's attention, there are lots of ways to do it, but coming back from the dead is a sure-fire winner. Jesus knew that, so while they gape at him, he feeds them a line which cut to the heart: "In the name of the Messiah, penance for the remission of sins is to be preached to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of this."

So here's this feeling--his work isn't done yet, and the only chance he'll get is for them to do it. So starting here in this city they are to preach the good news to the world. To the world!

Have you seen the commercial of Yul Brenner, the actor, telling people not to smoke? He filmed this shortly before he died of lung cancer; his face is callow, his skin is yellowed, and he tells you straight out, "Don't smoke. Just, don't smoke." It's an effective commercial because it's a voice from the grave. This is what happens in the Gospel today, Jesus comes back from the dead to tell the disciples now it's their turn. Preach the message to the world.

My brothers and sisters, this story comes to us with the same message. Jesus hands us the job of witnessing. I'm sure that among the original disciples, there were those who didn't want to witness. Just to believe in Jesus was enough for them; just to be alone with Jesus was enough. But it's not enough. It never was and it never will be. We cannot simply be alone in our prayer and presume we've done our duty. Christ calls people to action.

This year Nativity of Mary parish celebrates 50 years. You have much to be proud of--a faith-filled community, a wonderful school, good services in the parish. But I do wish to challenge each and every one of you today to some reflection. Here in your fiftieth year you hear Christ speak from the grave saying, "If my work is to continue, you must continue my work. You are to be my witnesses." Can you resolve to do something this 50th year to improve your action for Christ? Can you meet the people in your pew? Can you sing the hymns a little louder? Can you contribute a little more goods, a little more service to the parish? Can you be a leader in this community? We cannot rest on the work our ancestors have done. They depend on us to keep alive the spirit of Christ.

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