

HOMILY SUNDAY 12 – A*
“Be a Fearless Witness to Jesus”
(Jeremiah 20:7, 10-13; Psalm 69; Romans 5:12-15; Mt 10:26-33)

Do you see yourself as an evangelist?

Put your faith in Jesus; take courage, and evangelize.

In the first reading Jeremiah speaks out his message and suffers rejection. Yet he carries on because his faith in God’s presence in his life gives him courage.

In the second reading to the Romans, St. Paul gives us the core of the message we are to proclaim like Jeremiah: Jesus has saved us from sin by his death on the cross, a free gift. Moreover, he heals us of our sinfulness, that which makes us sin, also a free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounding for many.

In the gospel, Jesus missions the 12 to speak openly and to witness to him fearlessly. According to the New Interpreter’s Bible, the disciples will be persecuted as was Jesus. Just as he did not retaliate but withdrew, so also the disciple is not to respond to hostility in kind or with prayers for vengeance, but is to withdraw and continue the mission elsewhere, in the glad confidence that the parousia of the Son of Man will bring the divine kingdom to full reality. These sayings are addressed to disciples who already profess Christian faith, but are fearful of bearing public witness to it in the church’s mission. The disciples not only preached; they also proclaim Jesus who is pictured here as claiming to be the eschatological attorney before God the judge; the criterion of judgment will be the disciples’ present confession of Jesus, or lack of it.

In 1975, Pope Paul VI issued a ground-breaking encyclical entitled *Evangelization of the Modern World*. In this work, he challenges us all to take up the task of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ fearlessly and creatively.

In response to that invitation, I would like to share with you the thoughts of a friend who is more qualified than I to speak and write on evangelizing and witnessing with our lives. If you are wondering why I would want to share this person’s thoughts and experience with you at this time, allow me to first introduce him to you.

As a youthful friend of our family where I grew up in Highgate, Saskatchewan, I remember his honesty, hard work, obedience and generosity in caring for others. We went to the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon together, and there I was impressed by his humble involvement in student affairs. Along with a fellow student as part of the Civic-Cultural Association on campus, he was instrumental in bringing the International singing group *Up With People* to Saskatchewan.

A talented photographer, he started a home-portrait photography business to support himself as a university student. I worked for him as salesperson and proof-passer, and

was struck by his humility when at our first staff meeting he introduced himself only as the photographer.

We both joined *Up With People* and were often billeted in homes. In Cleveland, Ohio, we shared a bedroom. That night he invited me to pray with him, and taught me to pray spontaneously. The next morning, while I did my usual physical exercises, he read from his bible. That example inspired me to get my own bible and read start reading scripture.

Upon our return from our tour of France and Belgium, we both joined the congregation of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. There, as a kind of spiritual director, he heard my story – the first time that had ever happened to me. He pointed out to me that I needed to work on my relationship with my father, and suggested that I pray with one scripture passage only, Isaiah 43:1-7, for a whole month. That passage was all about being precious and honored in God's sight, not because of what I had done, but simply because God loved me. That was exactly what I needed to hear from God at that time of my life, I who had tried for so many years to earn my father's love, and was probably also trying to earn God's love in a similar fashion. That was a life-changing experience for me.

We both got involved in the Christopher Leadership course and at an instructor's seminar in Edmonton one weekend, he put his arm on my shoulder and told me that he had come to love me very much as a friend. He was not afraid to show affection. He also loved to play games, and helped me to relax and spend more time in leisurely activity.

He eventually left the Oblates, married and had a family. Whenever I would visit him and his family, the television would be turned off no matter what program was on. I felt affirmed and special.

When I ran into some personal difficulties, he understood me, stood by me and supported me, twice coming down to the States to visit me. We took a renewal program together, and began to share our journals. With him I was able to experience complete trust and openness, and to achieve intimacy. He truly became a soul-mate, a relationship that was life-giving and liberating for both of us. To this day, we share our journals and give each other feedback

For some years in the one area, we were able to minister together as a team. He taught me the effectiveness of team ministry and the importance of working through our differences and understanding each others personality types.

At the present moment, we have a committed relationship, and whenever we meet, we catch up on the time we were apart, then we share our way around the medicine wheel (Physical, Mental, Emotional, Relationship to God, others, self and creation, as well as our human sexuality). That is our way of experiencing the new life in Christ that we want to enjoy in this life, not only in the next.

I remember a Sunday recently when we drove together to a mission I had not yet visited as the archbishop. On the way we prayed the rosary and shared our way around the complete medicine wheel. Then we celebrated the Eucharist with another community and continued sharing on our way home. That evening we spent a quiet time together relaxing in the bishop's house. For the rest of that week I experienced a remarkable sense of well being and serenity that I am sure was the result of our fellowship that Sunday.

He is a warm, caring, compassionate, faithful person. As you can see, he is certainly qualified to speak and write on the topic of evangelization. I am delighted to introduce you to my best friend, who is also my Lord and Savior - please help me welcome
Jesus Christ!