

Stewardship Homily

October 1 – 2, 2011

“Aflame with the love of Jesus we reach out...”

Many of you may know that I have relatives in Germany. Over the years I've had the pleasure of spending time with them over there. At one point my cousins owned a vineyard and produced their own wine. Living along the Mosel River there are many, many vineyards. I remember going out with Franz-Josef and looking over the crop, seeing workers tending to the vines, and, if it was the right time of the year, see the harvesting of grapes.

I've been thinking of those times a lot these past weeks when our gospel passages at our weekend Masses have been about vineyards. I imagine Jesus standing there with us looking at those vineyards and saying, guys “a landowner planted a vineyard ...”

The vineyard, of course, is an image of the world that God has entrusted to us. In all three parables Jesus is very clear that the workers really do have work to do and not to take that work lightly. And today's focus seems to be on being fruitful. The last line of today's passage is: “the kingdom of God will be ... given to a people that will produce its fruit.” I would hope we could say that we are about life – sharing life, affirming life, caring for life, cherishing life, producing life. If we are not then we definitely need to do something about it.

I believe our experience of these last few months can teach us something about how we're “wired” naturally by God to be “workers in the vineyard.” When we heard that the waters would be rising what did we do? Many filled and hauled sandbags, we built dikes, moved belongings from the lower level of homes to the upper levels and for many the belongings were moved out completely. Folks made and shared food, helped with childcare. And when the waters subsided we helped clean and remove debris and sandbags – not only here in our Bismarck-Mandan area, but also up in Minot. I also know that countless prayers and financial gifts were also shared.

Our natural response through it all was to reach out and help. We couldn't just sit back and do nothing, could we? But that's nothing new to us. That's our way of life as followers of Christ. It's our life here in our parish. We share our skills, abilities, and talents, our time, and our monetary gifts for the good not only of our parish but also for our wider community.

We've begun our annual Stewardship renewal effort here in the parish. It's our opportunity to pause and evaluate whether we are being good workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

This year I've chosen as our theme "Aflame with the love of Jesus we reach out..." It's based on one of the prayers – from the Mass of the Assumption, August 15th – from the new Roman Missal that we'll begin using at the end of November. Because our love of and for Christ fills our hearts to overflowing we naturally have to reach-out and share as Jesus did.

This week you'll be receiving our Stewardship mailing. Take the time to reflect and pray about the ways that you can or do reach out in service to others – whether in the parish, the community and even beyond. How do I reach out with my time? How do I reach out with my abilities and skills and talents? How I do reach out with my financial gifts and treasure? Each of us – young or old, new to the parish or a veteran, active or homebound – does reach out in one way or another. Just as we "stepped up to the plate" during the flood, so we "step up to the plate" here in the parish.

I also challenge you not to be afraid to go just a bit further in the your sharing and reaching out. That's how we continue to grow both individually and as a parish family.

Allow the words of Jesus to sink into your hearts. May we produce much fruit in the vineyards of our lives and "aflame with the love of Jesus, let us reach out..."