

**Homily for Men's Catholic Mass and Breakfast
March 15, 2014**

**Holy Ghost Parish
Jerseyville, IL**

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Reverend Fathers and deacons, my dear brothers in Christ: In 2005, the American Film Institute issued a list of the top one hundred movie quotes of all time. Many of these quotes have become so popular that they stand alone as common sayings in our everyday language as ways of expressing a certain feeling for a specific situation. One example of this can be found in the 1939 classic, *The Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy clicks her heels together, repeating the phrase: "There's no place like home." We often use these words instinctively when we return home after a long journey, glad to be back in a familiar setting.

At times, these quotes can even be used to express a certain philosophy or mindset. Given that we are just about two weeks away from the opening day of another baseball season, I'd like to take a well known quote from the popular baseball movie, *Field of Dreams*. Toward the beginning of the movie, Kevin Costner's character hears a mysterious voice

whisper: “If you build it, he will come,” referring to the building of a baseball field in the middle of a cornfield in rural Iowa. This field would bring back the disgraced Shoeless Joe Jackson who was banned from baseball after the 1919 Black Sox scandal, giving him the chance to play once again.

This quote has been slightly modified and applied by many business entrepreneurs who operate under the principle: “If you build it, they will come.” They believe that they have a product or an idea that others will want, so they move forward thinking that people will be attracted by their vision and buy their product or visit their site. Unfortunately, many who operate under this model fail because they are so convinced of their own vision that they neglect to determine whether there is actually a market for their idea or not. An example of this can be seen in 1985 when the Coca-Cola Company, in an attempt to retain their number one spot in the soft drink market, discontinued their original product in favor of what would be referred to as ‘New Coke.’ What seemed like a good idea in the company’s mind was far from what the people wanted. In this case, their assumption that if they built it, they would come, was far from being true and they failed terribly. The company quickly scrapped the idea and

returned to the classic recipe that so many people had grown to love.

The reason I bring this phrase up is that it can also apply to how we sometimes approach the sharing of our Catholic faith. There was a time in our country when the local parish community played an extremely important role in the lives of the Catholic faithful. It was not uncommon to have different programs or devotions several nights a week, drawing together many people from the parish. The mindset of “if you build it, they will come” seemed to work fairly well in that culture.

In more recent times, with people moving further away from the parish churches and with so many options available to fill our free time, the parish community, in many cases, has diminished with regard to it being the center of activity for the members of the parish. Some of the programs that are started in parishes struggle to succeed because people are not coming. Other signs of the shifting culture are lower Mass attendance, fewer children involved in religious education, and a smaller number of marriages being celebrated in the Catholic Church. While the reasons for these declines can be complex, it is not unlikely that part of the reason is to be found in our operating under the philosophy that “if you build it, they will come.”

Our Gospel for today offers some insights into this situation. Jesus is teaching us of the great importance of loving one's neighbor. He challenges us to look beyond those with whom we are most comfortable, those who think, look, and act like us. Setting limits on whom we choose to love places us in the same company as the tax collectors and the pagans of His day. As Christians, we are invited to a higher level, a level of perfection in imitation of our Heavenly Father who loves all of those whom He has created.

When it comes to sharing our faith and involving people in the life of the parish and the Church, a similar approach should be taken. We cannot be content just to focus our efforts on those who are already committed disciples of Christ. We are encouraged to expand our scope when considering to whom we will spread our faith. From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has encouraged all Catholics, clergy, religious, and laity alike, to become "missionary disciples"¹ who share the experience of their love of God with others in word and deed, not being satisfied to remain turned in on ourselves as if we were members of an exclusive club.

In addressing the young people of the world at World Youth Day this past summer in Rio de Janeiro, the Holy Father offered the following words which apply to everybody: "Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent."² Herein lies a very important part of the solution to how our various programs and involvement in the life of the Church can be more successful, by reaching out to those who do not necessarily fit the mould of a typical participant and inviting them to encounter the beauty of our Catholic faith.

We can apply this reflection to our gathering here this morning. It is certainly encouraging to see such a good turnout of men of all ages. I think what we will find, though, is that many of us who are gathered here are already faithful, committed Catholics who are earnestly striving to grow in holiness. This is indeed a good thing because it gives us encouragement and energy to know that we are not alone in these efforts, but that we are united with many other men who are likewise resolved to put faith at the center of their lives.

At the same time, though, we must be just as mindful of who is *not* here at this event. How many of our family members, co-workers, or

friends who *could* be here are involved in something else this morning? We are all probably aware of men who are struggling with their faith, or who do not practice their faith, or who claim to not have any faith at all. These are the men that we would really like to be here. This is not to say that it is not important for us to be here, because it certainly is to our benefit. There is, however, so much potential for programs like this to impact even more men to offer them the opportunity to embrace and live their faith.

We cannot be passive in our faith and just assume that these men will come to us. We must go out to them and encourage them, first and foremost by the witness of a life rooted in faith. Seeing this, they will be more receptive to the invitation that we offer to come and see for themselves the difference that faith can make in their lives. In doing so, we truly put into practice the teaching of the Gospel to love *all* of our neighbors by sharing with them the path that will lead them to eternal life. There is nothing greater that we could offer to them than the gift of our faith.

As we receive the Eucharist today, let us ask the Lord for the courage to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to those around us, especially those who seem to be farthest away from the faith. May the example of our lives

rooted in our Catholic faith be a light to them that attracts them to seek the source of that light, Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120.

² Pope Francis, *Holy Mass on the Occasion of the XXVIII World Youth Day*, 28 July 2013.