

4 Lent A SML 2017
JN 9:1-41

At the beginning of Lent, I finished an intergenerational scripture study on the Gospel of John, specifically, John's account of the passion, death and resurrection. In my introductory remarks, I taught John wrote his gospel to those on the fringes of Jewish life, to Jewish people sitting on the fence between "Should I stay Jewish or should I convert to Christianity?" John's gospel provides a very convincing argument to convert, to become Christian. The question arises: Why the need for such a convincing argument? What's the hold up? What's keeping John's audience from converting from Judaism to Christianity was **the inevitable risk involved**.

John's Gospel was written in 90 AD, 20 years after the Romans destroyed the great Temple in Jerusalem. And it's been a good 60 years since our Blessed Lord was put to death, and His fame has not decreased. If anything, it increased. Judaism was in dire straights. No Temple, no organization to their religion, and people were converting by thousands, left and right, to the New Way, to Christianity.

So the same year John wrote his Gospel, the chief priests and rabbis held a council at Jamnia to determine a plan of

action. Hence, the incredible risk. Their plan of action was: *APOSUNAGOGES*: OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE! Anyone who chooses to believe in Jesus Christ is *APOSUNAGOGES*: OUT OF THE SYNAGOGUE! And you will be disowned by your parents, your brothers, your sisters, your spouse, your kids, and you will lose your job. You will be ostracized and your name will be stricken from the land. You walk down the street and you see your son walking up the street, you son will spit on you first and then cross to the other side. Every Jew knew that if the high priest walked up to you and said, "Give God the praise," you were being called on the carpet. And at that moment, if you said you were a Christian, you lost everything: *APOSUNAGOGES*. **There was inevitable risk involved in making the decision** to convert to Christianity.

So let's go to the gospel at hand. More specifically, let's go right to the response of the parents of the blind man:

His parents answered and said: 'We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone acknowledged him as the Christ, he would be *APOSUNAGOGES*!

Compare their response to that of the blind man himself, who after getting thrown under the bus by his parents, did not back down, and is going toe to toe with the higher ups:

So a second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, 'Give God the praise! (Here you go, he knows exactly what's happening – he's being called on the carpet).

We know this man is a sinner . . .

If he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see . . .

I told you already and you did not listen. Do you want to hear it again?

Do you want to be his disciples too?

This is what's so amazing that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him.

It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind.

If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything . . . you were totally born in sin, and you are trying to teach us?

Then they *APOSUNAGOGES!* They threw him out.

There is inevitable risk involved in making the decision to convert to Christianity: this is a blind man who was:

- ✓ never educated,
- ✓ never learned a skill,
- ✓ never lived away from his parent's home,

and now he's *APOSUNAGOGES!* No home, no family, no work, nothing.

No matter what decision is made in life, inevitable risk is involved. When you get married, you are taking a risk with your spouse, which is why you want to be as certain as you can that your intended is the person God chose to show you how much God loves you. Don't meet your spouse in March and marry in April – hence the reason why the Church requires a young couple to plan their wedding at least a year in advance.

Regardless of how long you wait, walk down the wedding aisle knowing full well that your spouse cannot possibly meet all your needs. Marry your spouse and there is inevitable risk.

Be ordained a priest and there is inevitable risk.

Take a job with another company, but do your homework first: website, salary increases, 401K, benefits, advancement

opportunities, recognition, job satisfaction, PTO, etc.

Regardless of how well you research, you sign on the dotted line knowing full well that this company cannot possibly meet all your needs because the company is balancing the needs of 1,200 other employees, stockbrokers, board of directors, community interests. So while I like my boss and everyone is more than just pleasant, that 2 percent raise I got this year means I'm making less this year than last year because cost of living is higher than that. There is inevitable risk involved in making the decision to take a job.

Put your heart and soul into a prayer life and into a parish, as a priest or as a parishioner. Regardless of how hard you pray or how hard you work in that parish, you know full well the parish cannot possibly meet all your needs because there's over 4,000 other families besides yours, there's only two priests, for now, and they're only human, and the lady sitting next to you is as perfect as you are. There is inevitable risk involved in making the decision to join a parish.

As a Churchgoer, you hear as much as I do as a priest about why people don't go to Church, that the number of unchurched is rising. People hear you are a churchgoer, and

you hear the sneery. Greater numbers are having a problem with organized religion.

Well I have a problem with people who have a problem with organized religion. What do you say when someone learns you are a Church goer and they say to you, "Well, you don't have to go to Church to pray." Tell me what you would say. You can certainly start off by saying that's true, but what a disservice you do to your own faith posture, and what a disservice you do to the Catholic Church, to organized religion, if you start and end by saying, "That's true."

Let me tell you what you could say:

"You don't need to come to Church to pray, that's true. So

...

1. Tell me about your extensive prayer life at home. Tell me how you follow the gospel and close your door to pray.
2. Tell me about the scripture you prayed with this week, because we read scripture in Church - four readings: two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament.
3. Tell me about the research you did on the scripture you read. Because for every minute I preach, I do about an hour's research, give or take. So if I'm preaching 7 minutes this week, you tell me about the seven hours you put aside for scripture study.

4. Tell me about the songs of praise you sang this past week, because we sing in Church.
5. Tell me about the money you give to the poor. I trust you give to charity every week, because Church goers give to charity.
6. Tell me how you educate your children. Tell me how much you have taught them about God, because my Church teaches children and my Church teaches adults about God. Earlier, I mentioned just one – the intergenerational scripture study on John’s passion, death and resurrection.
7. If you are Catholic, tell me how you go about receiving Holy Communion. No, you don’t need to go to Church to pray, but you need to go to Church to receive Holy Communion. And if you are a Catholic, for you, Holy Communion is God.
8. Tell me about how you help those who grieve. Tell me how you pray with them, because we have bereavement ministry in my Church.
9. Tell me about how you help the poor, how you visit the homes of poor people, determine what their needs are and fill them, because we have St. Vincent dePaul Society in my Church.
10. Tell me about, tell me about, tell me about. The list goes on, for a church goer . . .
11. And don’t tell me that Church goers are hypocrites. To me, the hypocrites are the non-Church goers, who use the

Church as the stage, as the backdrop for their baptisms, their weddings and their funerals.

You think organized religion is a waste of time? I think you are selfish and lazy because you do not want to commit your time, treasure and talent to an organization that lives Gospel values by the hook of the Fisherman or by the crook of the Shepherd, for 2000 years.

So yes there is risk involved in going to Church, because they could come back with a question. “Um, you’ve just told me everything that your Church does for others. What you do for your Church? Tell me how you are active in your Church.” And if you have nothing to say, then they’ll be one up on you.