

My Brothers and Sisters,

If there is one theme in today's readings, it is that God wants all people to be saved.

In today's Gospel, Jesus healed a Canaanite woman's daughter, a Gentile. Paul wrote to the Romans that God wants both Jews and Gentiles to be saved. In today's first reading, Isaiah proclaimed that foreigners who join themselves to the Lord and hold to God's covenant will be welcome on God's holy mountain and in God's house because his "*house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*"

However, in another passage in his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, "*For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?*" [10:13-15a].

In today's second reading, Paul refers to himself as "*the apostle to the Gentiles.*" The word *apostle* means "one who is sent." By our baptism and especially by our confirmation, we are all called to be apostles. When we did our self-evaluation as part of the *Connected in the Spirit* process and when our cohort did its self-evaluation, it was very clear that our cohort parishes neither individually nor collectively have been able to do much evangelization or re-evangelization.

As we move into the future, an increased emphasis on both will be necessary. Evangelization will be necessary because of the changing demographics of our parish. There was a time when Little Flower was an area where Catholics most wanted to live. Today the number of Catholics living in or moving into our parish is much smaller than in times past. Re-evangelization is necessary because so many Catholics have stopped practicing their Catholic faith or have stopped practicing any faith or have joined another church or religion. Paul wrote, "*For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.*" If we take Paul's words seriously, we will feel compelled to reach out to them.

In the past, it was believed that young people who left the Church would return when they married or had children. However, according to the author of *Forming Intentional Disciples: the Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*,¹ "national studies have revealed that those who leave the Church do *not*, by and large, return. They usually go elsewhere or stop practicing their faith altogether" (p. 16). Also, "*only 30 percent of Americans who were raised Catholic are still 'practicing'*—meaning they attend Mass at least once a month" (p. 24).

My brothers and sisters, our challenge is that it has not been part of our tradition to invite or encourage others to become Catholic. The reason I mention this today is because RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, will begin after Labor Day. After Communion, an RCIA team member will speak briefly about RCIA. The RCIA provides an easy way for all of us to evangelize or re-evangelize. At the very least, most of us could recommend at least one person whom the parish might invite to RCIA.

¹Sherry A. Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2012).