

FEBRUARY 27/28, 2010



VISION:

Finding deeper meaning in our relationships and our Catholic Faith

VALUES:

- Personal and Community Growth
- Relevancy of faith in our daily lives
- Relationship to God and one another

MISSION:

Provide opportunities to:

- Experience growth and relevancy of our Catholic faith as individuals and as a community.
- Relate the Year of Renewal experience to the entire SJF Community.
- Build and celebrate community.

ST. JOHN FISHER CHAPEL UNIVERSITY PARISH

What is the year of Renewal at St. John Fisher?

In the biblical tradition, every seven years the Jewish people celebrated a “Sabbath” year. It was an opportunity to start over, correcting the failures of the past and committing to a better future. For Christians, we have that opportunity to celebrate a Sabbath every week.

The year of renewal provides a time to read, think, share, and celebrate who we are as believers. We will have the opportunity to step back from our usual Church participation and take a look at some fundamentals in our faith.

We will invite all of our SJF community members to set aside quality time to consider a few aspects of our faith. You may discover some ideas that you want to think about or talk about. You may find that you are called to set aside some ideas that you have held for years.

We ask that you pray before and after you read these brief articles and that you listen with openness and expectation to each other. It is in this openness to the printed material and in your discussions with each other that your own personal faith will be deepened and enriched.

Finally, as a community, may we discover a renewed Word of God for our world today.

Weekend DATES

The program is centered around six weekends (plus a Tuesday follow-up) through 2010. Small groups will gather on other days after the Year of Renewal (YOR) weekends.

Fall Theme: *God's Presence and Call:*

Oct. 3-4: In my personal life.

Oct. 24-25: In my personal life related to community.

Nov. 14-15: In my personal life as a member of the larger community.

Winter theme: *My/Our response to God's Presence and Call:*

Feb. 6-7: My response as an individual.

Feb. 27-28: My/Our response as belonging to a community.

March 20-21: As individuals and as a community.

Opening PRAYER

Let us Pray ... We take a few moments of silence to ask God to open our minds and hearts and to gift us with deeper wisdom and understanding.

Small sharing groups are encouraged to begin their session by reading the booklet, together or individually, before they begin sharing.

Personal REFLECTION

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it. (Mark 8: 34, 35)



Introduction

In our previous discussions, we explored God's presence and call to us personally, in the "outsider," and in the church; next we turned to how we respond by observing, judging, and acting. In this week's booklet, we press on to search for God in unlikely places.



Meeting God

There is a story about a spiritual seeker, always in pursuit of perfection, searching for genuine contact with God. Knowing that, in many religious images, the mountaintop is the dwelling place of God, this seeker went to great pains to climb the holy mountain. This meant sacrifice and effort, keeping an eye on the grand goal of actually seeing God. This journey took an extended length of time and considerable expense, but the prospect of a personal meeting with God fostered the effort and perseverance required.

When the seeker got to the top of the mountain, God was nowhere to be seen. The seeker was profoundly disappointed and inquired of the other people on the mountaintop. “Where is God whom I have been seeking?” to which another holy person replied, “You must have passed God on the road you were climbing. God has gone down into the marketplace; if you want to see God’s face, go back down.”

Indeed, going down into the marketplace to meet God might require more than climbing a mountain.



The Transfiguration

In the Gospel reading for this week of renewal, we have an account of the Transfiguration of Jesus. Maybe we are mildly aware of the details of the story and we probably remember Peter’s words, “Lord it is good for us to be here. Let us build three tents.” What we might not have noticed is that Peter slept through the conversation Jesus had with Moses and Elijah. What did Peter miss? Moses and Elijah “spoke of his (Jesus’) exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem.” That trip to Jerusalem would lead Jesus to his suffering and death, his final proclamation of the Gospel.

When the disciples had come to the end of their mountaintop experience, the Scripture tells us they saw “only Jesus.” Even though they had not grasped the connection with Jesus’ mission, they could not have remained unchanged by this mountaintop prayer experience.

Here we have a literary connection between the exhilaration of mountain top prayer of the disciples and the fact that we actually live at the bottom of the mountain, in the marketplace, where we may *think* there is very little religious significance.

When we consider the breadth of the marketplace, the city centers beyond our neighborhoods, that cross section of humanity, God's presence may not be the first thought that comes to mind. Outside of our spiritual neighborhoods we may distance ourselves from populations of different religious, ethnic, political, economic or gender orientation; we may find ourselves thinking that we have little in common with *those* people, people we think of as "them." As long as we think of "*them*" we, like Peter, have slept through the message.



Yes, But...

Most of us grew up in relatively well ordered homes in relatively safe neighborhoods. We probably had access to good elementary and secondary education, maybe higher education. We've probably had opportunities for employment, travel, leisure activities. It is likely that we live in clean homes, good and secure neighborhoods. We might experience a prayerful community at our parish and have opportunities for service available to us without even leaving the environs.

This *might* be mountaintop living; this *might* be the limit of our experiences of God. What more could we learn about God, by going down the mountain? Like the spiritual seeker above, preparation for the journey is required. What are the barriers that we

can identify? Maybe there are fears and misgivings about leaving our comfort zone.

Maybe we would realize that we had slept through the real message. After all, in the last judgment recorded in Matthew's Gospel, there are no "points" awarded for attending church or saying prayers; the only criteria for being judged worthy of the kingdom was how we treated the "least of these," Dorothy Day says it well. "I believe that our salvation depends on the poor." Maybe our salvation depends on the people we call "them."



God in the Marketplace

Surely it is easier to stay on the mountaintop, where we can feel close to God, proud of our spiritual success and possibly even our moral righteousness. "They" are the unsaved; we are not like "them." "They" are what Mother Teresa has called, "the distressing disguises of Christ." In serving in distressing places, we begin to see the face of Christ. We begin to think, not in terms of "they or them" but in terms of brotherhood and sisterhood.

What would happen if five or ten friends decided to go down into the marketplace to simply serve the poor? What if some simply decided to start by making eye contact with some who are different? What if some small groups decided to leave mountaintop faith to conform that faith to the exodus of Jesus, to recognize God in the marketplace? What if they spent some time reflecting on those distressing disguises? How might they be changed? How might the poor change them? How might "they" assist in our salvation?

According to Harvey Cox in his new book, *The Future of Faith*, one striking characteristic of the mega-churches is that there are outreach and service groups through which *all* members can be active in the marketplace. Our Baptism has called every one of us to be minister, sending us into the marketplace by way of the servants' entrance of the doors of our church.



Getting Closer to God

Surely, God is closer to us than the breath within us. We may draw comfort from those times of mountaintop prayer, but that's not where we live.

Most of us have observed the dynamic of falling in love, when there is sweetness and joy in being together. During this phase of real love, little effort might be required; one could barely imagine a time of struggle or disappointment. "It is good for us to be here." Day to day living in love may not be all that exhilarating, however. True love requires time, makes demands and takes effort. This is analogous to the coming down from the mountaintop into the marketplace where the experience of God is expanded, enriched, deepened. As Christians we are called to go out, to search for that face of God in its distressing disguises. We can fall in love all over again if we can only take the risk of going out to be of service to "them." We might find ourselves saying to God in prayer, "I never realized *this* about you!" The mountaintop might be all about us. The marketplace is all about God.

The Catholic Church **TEACHES**

There is nothing, in short, for which Christians yearn more than to serve the people of the modern world generously and effectively. We Christians shoulder a gigantic task which is to introduce love into the world, that love which we receive ourselves from Christ. May Christ be with us in our work.

*(The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the
Modern World: Vatican II in Plain English)*

Small Group SHARING

What are your personal reservations about serving outside your current comfort zone? What would be a help to you in beginning service “in the marketplace?”

How have you been changed by leaving your comfort zone, going from the mountaintop into the marketplace?

Given the opportunity to work with others, how can you picture yourself serving “them?”

Closing PRAYER

Conclude this time by reflecting on the Year of Renewal prayer.
(See back page.)

A Faith to Believe In

Song for the St John Fisher Year of Renewal

Terry Gonda & Kirsti Reeve

$\text{♩} = 114$

The musical score is written for a single voice in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo of 114 beats per minute. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are: We're long-ing for You to deep - en our__ faith Draw us in clo-ser through love__ and through grace. Re - new us, trans-form us, con - nect us as one. So we may con - tin - ue the work__ of Your Son__ We're seek - ing deep - er mean - ing__ And a faith to be - lieve__ in__

Verses (One for each weekend):

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| 1. Like little children, we come to You
Help us to open our hearts
To notice Your presence in all that we do
Make us aware of Your call | 4. Like Simon Peter, abandoning all
Help us cling only to You
Here we are, ready to answer Your call
Leaving our nets on the shore |
| 2. Like Bartimeus, we want to see
Help us to open our eyes
Finding Your call to community
In every part of our lives | 5. Like the disciples, in awe and in fear,
As Your glory transfigures all
It is indeed good for us to be here
May we respond to Your call |
| 3. Lord, when uncertainty hits from all sides
Help us keep trusting in You
Keep us alert to the signs of the times
For only Your call will endure | 6. Just like the Pharisees, we're quick to judge
Help us to put down our stones
And walk a new road of forgiveness and love
Knowing we're never alone |

Final Refrain:

We're longing for You to deepen our faith
Draw us in closer through love and through grace
Renew us, transform us, connect us as one
So we may continue the work of Your Son
We're seeking deeper meaning, and a faith to believe in
We're **finding** deeper meaning ... And a faith to believe in



A Year of
Renewal
PRAYER

Gracious God, you are our Maker, Keeper and Lover. Your goodness embodies each one of us. Help us to appreciate you in one another and to recognize that all we do flows from your generosity and creativity working in and through our lives. During this year of renewal, we ask that you will change us! Help us to BE Christ in this world, bringing light to the darkness, hope to despair, trust to uncertainty and new life to devastation. Strengthen our commitment to do your work in our homes, in our parish, in our community and in our world. We pray with sincere hearts and open minds, in your name, O God. Amen.