

When Everybody Does it Better

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year A

Exodus 22:20-26
Psalms 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

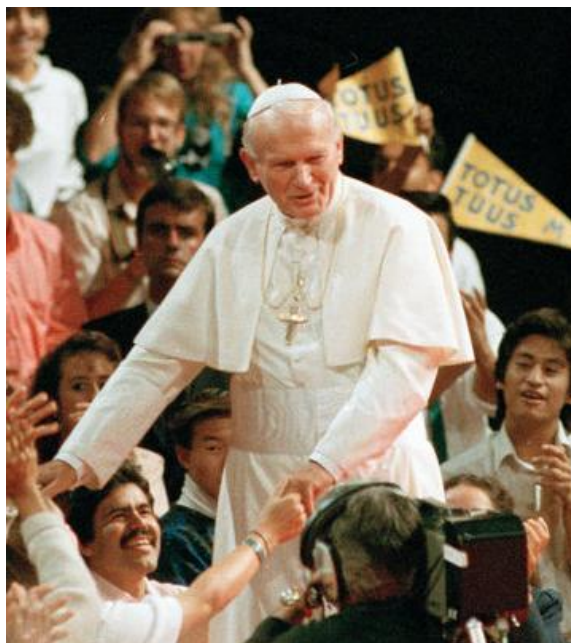
*1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10***
Matthew 22:34-40

In 1987 during his visit to Los Angeles, Pope John Paul II participated in a youth rally at which groups from around the country participated and asked questions via satellite. At one point, one of the “satellite” groups shared that they were responding to the Pope’s message by working with the poor – the shelters, the food kitchens, and so on. Videos of the youth in action were briefly displayed. In response to this, the Holy Father turned to one of the young people present with him, for whom he had answered a previous question, and said, regarding the group on screen, “Their example is a better answer than the one I gave to you.”

Of course the entire crowd of teenagers cheered!

During [the] year of St. Paul we [heard] in the First Letter to the Thessalonians Paul’s lavish praise for the people of Thessalonica, who have heard the Gospel and embraced it with flying colors. Paul remembers his preaching mission to the city and lauds highly the manner in which the Thessalonians have lived what they have learned, being themselves instruments of the Gospel’s spread. Paul acknowledges their present affliction, but also rejoices that it did not eclipse their joy.

Paul notes his own manner in preaching, but recognizes the people’s imitation of his example and his zeal, even to the point of outdoing him in evangelization – *“from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth...in every place your faith in God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.”* In short, they



have been so successful in receiving and living the Gospel that it has made Paul’s preaching obsolete! He has no need to say anything! He has nothing more to add!

What are teachers to do when their students come to teach their subject better, or when children out-do their parents? What is an evangelist or preacher to do when he or she has done their job too well – when the congregation’s witness to their faith outdoes the preaching of the preacher; when they have no need to say anything further?

In many parishes, there is usually the memory of a beloved pastor once assigned to that parish. Often, this priest and his work are so fondly remembered that his name is virtually synonymous with the parish itself. One rarely can think or speak of that particular church without thinking of that particular priest. However, how many

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parish or church communities are known for the reverse?

How many parishes are known for the zeal of the *people* in living the faith they profess, over and above the preaching of their priests? How many parishes eclipse the priest and religious assigned to serve them, because they are so strong in living their Catholic faith, so dedicated to spreading it, so zealous in bearing witness (and I mean everybody, if not the vast majority), that they do it even better than those who serve and lead them? How many priests and religious can say of their parishes: “The volunteerism here is so high, the Masses and Reconciliation services so full, the lay evangelization so strong, their prioritizing and punctuality to Sunday Mass so unfailing, their public behavior so reflective of what they believe, and their teaching of the faith to their children so consistent to the teachings and practices of the Church; they so project the love of the Gospel and the Lord, that we have nothing more to add”?

How many catechists can express a

similar sentiment about their students? How many Catholic parents can say this about their children and grandchildren? How many priests can say this about their parishes, as John Paul II said it of the young people to whom he preached during his visit to Los Angeles? How many bishops can say this about their dioceses, as St. Paul says it of Thessalonica?



A popular theme to an old James Bond movie declares, “Nobody does it better.” St. Paul, however, declares to the Thessalonians – *you* do it better! Perhaps an honorable goal of any priest, religious, bishop – of any preacher of the faith – would be to eventually say of his own congregation, community or diocese:

“*Everybody* does it better, and I have nothing more to add!”

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