

THE VOICE

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church • Bloomfield, NJ

Learning from John Angotti

Saturday, May 10 was a beautiful, clear morning as dozens of liturgical ministers gathered in the parish center for a workshop with John Angotti. John began the day by sharing some meaningful stories of his own life and journey in faith, and continued to do that throughout - sometimes through the spoken word, other times stepping to the keyboard and giving us the wonderful gift of his music. But, while he was at the keyboard, we were swept into singing along with him; reminded that singing is praying twice.

His stories and song illustrated a very beautiful message—liturgy can and does happen all around us if only we open our hearts, eyes and ears to see the evidence. John challenged us to a new level of awareness throughout the workshop.

A particularly moving segment involved an understanding of the word shepherd. John explained that he'd wanted to understand this better, so he spent time with actual shepherds guarding sheep on a mountain. These shepherds explained to him that often the young lambs are very frisky and tend to want to run far away, not knowing the dangers and potentially even falling off the mountain to their deaths. In order to protect these lambs, the shepherds will sometimes very carefully fracture a tiny bone in the back leg. This controlled



▲ John Angotti performing at Saint Thomas the Apostle on May 10th, 2008.

injury heals quickly and causes no permanent harm, but while it is healing the lamb learns to stay close to the shepherd.

John then projected an image of Jesus holding a lamb onto the screen and brought the conversation back to our own Shepherd and us as His lambs. Then he asked the question “Have there been times when you’ve felt injured, bruised? Maybe the Shepherd knew you needed to stay closer to Him for awhile?” The room grew silent for several moments as each of us, in his or her own way, contemplated that very question.

John also shared his personal story of learning not to short circuit any experience. He recounted that he, like so many other young people, had chosen to forgo his graduation ceremony and opted to take that time for a trip with a few close friends. A year later at his sister’s graduation he found an excitement in watching the entire group receive their degrees and formally go out to use that knowledge in life—and realized he had missed that ex-

perience and regretted his choice. He then compared that to the choice some people make to leave Mass right after communion. Ending a lovely day with his beautiful song “I Send You Out,” the Liturgical Ministers didn’t seem eager to run out, but lingered to soak in the experience.

– Eileen Conte



▲ Members of the STA Youth Group on stage with John Angotti.

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**John will be at St. Thomas,
Pentecost Weekend!**

May 30th-31st 2009

It's Sunday. Are You Headed to Mass or the Soccer Field?

It's Sunday morning and church bells are ringing, beckoning the faithful to Mass. But, there's another demand also beckoning. Organized athletic activities are often scheduled for Sundays, and youngsters all across the state are gearing up for an active morning on the field.

No one would dispute the health benefits of an active lifestyle. Certainly we encourage our children to spend less time in front of televisions and computers and to participate more in activities that help them develop in physically beneficial ways. In addition, let's not forget the great lessons in sportsmanship and team playing that sports also impart to our children.

While we tend to our children's bodies and minds as responsible parents, we can and should also tend to their souls and their spirituality. The lessons of Christianity can stand alongside those lessons in sportsmanship to help guide children through life. While they may be a member of a soccer or football team during their youth, our children will be members of their Catholic communities throughout their lives.

As with almost every other aspect of

today's busy lifestyles, juggling all the demands on a family's time is a constant challenge and we often have to make choices.

Recently in some New Jersey parishes, the issue of sports and their conflict with Sunday religious observances has received more than a little attention. Some parishes have actually officially requested their townships to ban sports games on Sundays.

But, is this really the solution? Certainly, the great diversity of cultures and faiths that make up this great country we live in provides also for a range of observances.

As anyone who has walked through nearby Brookdale Park on a Sunday morning can tell you, each field is usually occupied with some organized athletic pursuit. With a demand for fields exceeding availability, schedulers have limited choices on the timing of activities.

However, today most parishes offer masses for the faithful to observe the Sabbath on both late Saturday, as well as several on Sunday. This flexibility can accommodate almost any busy schedule. It's up to us as parents to set the example for our children on where we place our values.



So, when the team coach is calling, look at the schedule and don't forget that other great coach, the one who will help guide you and your children through the obstacles and challenges of life.

— Renée Miscione

To take a quick survey on sports and religion, visit our website and click the "sports survey" link.

St. Thomas the Apostle Church Financial Report Year Ended June 30, 2008			
	7/1/06—7/30/07 Actual	7/1/07—7/30/08 Actual	7/1/08—7/30/09 Projected
Where The Money Came From			
Sunday Collections	\$883,134	\$917,369	\$1,024,900
Christmas & Easter Collections	164,715	146,828	149,000
AAA & Special Collections	299,988	267,201	246,527
Education Receipts	1,470,934	1,467,150	1,406,848
Other Income	170,496	157,819	205,200
Fund Raising	92,833	96,404	91,950
Total	\$3,082,100	\$3,052,771	\$3,124,425
Where The Money Went			
Parish Operating Expenses	\$894,557	\$922,793	\$981,100
Parish Programs	48,115	57,391	52,725
Education Expense	1,849,474	1,826,539	1,771,600
Charitable Contributions	340,668	332,236	319,000
Total	\$3,132,814	\$3,138,959	\$3,124,425
Over Or (Short) For The Year	(\$50,714)	(\$86,188)	\$0

Remembering All Souls

When my stepfather died from a heart attack at age 66, my step-sister, Belinda, was in the hospital's private waiting room when the sad news was delivered. Her father, a good and decent man, had been a loving husband to my mother, a wonderful father figure to my siblings and me, and a devout convert to the Catholic faith. But it was while everyone was gathered in the waiting room that my stepsister recalls an interesting account. She remembers quite vividly the few people who were there---my mother, my sister, my nephew, two of my brothers, and a lone man she didn't recognize.

"We were all crying," she told me, "but even through my tears I remember thinking who was this strange man and why was he in the room with our family during this time."

Everyone else seemed to be oblivious of the man, and when she inquired about him later, no one recalled seeing him at all. Then it dawned on her that there had been something awfully familiar about the nameless man standing quietly but peacefully beside family members as they mourned.

"He kinda looked like Daddy!" she exclaimed, recalling old pictures of her father in his youth. He was much younger and trimmer, she noted, but the resemblance was striking.

Did my stepsister see our dad's spirit that night at the hospital? I suppose we will never know for sure, but it is comforting to know that our Catholic faith teaches there is life after death. Catholic tradition and doctrine encourages us to remember our deceased relatives and friends and to pray for their salvation and the salvation of all souls. This is especially true during the month of November, when the Church celebrates the feast of All Souls' Day. As noted in the Catholic Encyclopedia, the theological basis for the feast is derived from the doctrine that those who die with venial sins and have not fully atoned for past transgressions '...are debarred from the Beatific Vision.' Church doctrine also teaches that from the very earliest Christian tradition, the faithful on earth can

Every day is a new opportunity for us to pray for others, ourselves, and all those who have left this life in the hope of rising.

help the deceased by offering prayers and sacrifices---most notably, the sacrifice of the Mass.

Praying for the dead goes as far back as the early Church where the tombs of the faithful in the Roman catacombs had inscriptions of hope and petitions for peace and rest. It was also common practice to gather at the graves of the deceased on the anniversary of their deaths to make intercessions for them. By the end of the fourth century, not only were prayers for the dead found in all liturgies, but it was determined by the Church Fathers, including St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, that such practice came directly from the apostles.

Every day is a new opportunity for us to pray for others, ourselves, and all those who have gone to their rest in the hope of rising. This November, as we celebrate the feast of All Souls and remember all those who have gone on before us, make a special effort to light a candle, say a rosary, visit a gravesite, fast, pray, or make small sacrifices in their behalf. It is especially important to attend Mass and to pray for our deceased loved ones and all of the faithful departed. Our prayers are a reminder that the bond between this world and the next is inextricably linked. As Christians, and as members of the communion of saints, we recognize that our spiritual journeys could never end in the small room of a hospital or elsewhere on earth. For, as our Profession of Faith reminds us at every Mass, "...we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

— Angelique Butler Sharps

Using Technology

Anyone who teaches or has children knows how hard it is to keep their attention. The catechist has an even tougher challenge to educate our youth with only one hour a week.

By teaching religious education and working on the communications committee over the past year I find it makes sense to combine the two efforts. In my seven years teaching 5th, 6th and 7th grade CCD, I sensed a disconnect between our experience of liturgy on Sunday and what was taught in the classroom. The 5th grade focuses on the sacraments, the 6th grade on the Old Testament and the 7th grade on the life of Christ. By using a digital camera, laptop and digital projector I am able to bring a lot of St. Thomas Parish into the classroom to help bridge that disconnect.

St. Thomas has great stained glass windows depicting the mysteries of the rosary and I use them to teach about the life of Christ and the Holy Days of Obligation. I created flash cards and pass them around the class. We also have artwork of Old Testament figures like Moses, Melchizedek, King David and Elijah. St. Thomas is blessed with many pictures and statues of saints and I use them to give students visual aides to start the discussion.

High above the pews in the transepts of our Church are stained glass windows of the Sacraments, where former parishioners and priests were the models for the people. As a class we can look at the signs and symbols associated with the sacraments and have a great dialog on why those symbols were used and why they are important. I was also able to take pictures of people receiving the sacraments to remind them of what they received or what they are preparing to receive.

Each grade level covers the liturgical year. Our books have some nice drawings, but after a couple years of teaching I thought, "Why not give them an audio visual of what our Church looks like during the six liturgical seasons (Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, Triduum and Easter) to teach the lesson." I took a few pictures

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Using Modern Technology

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of our Church (which always looks great, especially during Christmas and Easter!) for each season. And I am able to reuse these when we start each liturgical season to help review, reinforce and highlight the difference between them.

When the pope came in April 2008 I showed my class all the different signs and symbols we have on the St. Thomas property about the papacy. I also used a YouTube video of Kelly Clarkson, of American Idol fame, singing Ave Maria to Benedict XVI for an opening prayer.

My goal is to make faith more tangible for the students and I find positive results in that they hold onto more facts, are better behaved and, most importantly, ask questions.

We have such a beautiful church and it communicates our faith to us in so many different ways.

What is great about technology today is that it allows teachers to share lesson plans and update existing ideas to fit their needs in the classroom.

I also received some feedback from other parishes who viewed our website and offered their thanks for giving them brainstorming ideas for their religious education program.

– Tom Rossano

If you have any feedback about this article, please email me at webmaster@stachurchbloomfield.com. You can also listen to me reading this article online at <http://www.stachurchbloomfield.com/ministries/communications/>.

THE VOICE

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Ambassadors of Christ

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God.”

– 2 Corinthians 5:20

At the end of June on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Universal Church invited us to dedicate a year of reflection from June 2008-June 2009 on the great missionary person of St Paul. What is St Paul commissioning us to when he says “So we are ambassadors for Christ?”

Webster’s New World Dictionary says, “Ambassador is the highest ranking representative of one country to another.” The word “ambassador” has political, moral and social overtones to it. When ambassadors go to live or be in the other nation, they are given the responsibility of representing the policies, ideal, values of their country of origin. While representing their nation they are called to reflect the spirit of the country they call home.

Why would St Paul use such a word to describe the Corinthian converts to Christianity? What was he trying to say to them? How are they to be ambassadors? And of whom and for what? Paul emphatically indicates that the new Christians are to be ambassadors of Christ by carrying the heart of the message of reconciliation to others thus becoming the presence of Christ restoring the world to God, to others, and to ourselves.

The message of reconciliation is central to the message and mission of the Gospel. In truth, Jesus the Christ has already brought reconciliation to the world and restored humanity to oneness and peace with God by his coming, his life, death and resurrection. When he was among us, he proclaimed the Father’s infinite love for us, and his only desire was to unite us with the Father and all creation.

According to Gospels and the Letters of St Paul, Jesus delegated his disciples to spread the Good News of peace and restoration of all things in God. We are to continue Jesus’ mission of unity and reconciliation bringing it to completion.

Reconciliation cannot happen unless we come to terms with the alienation – the brokenness, the woundedness - we experience with our divided selves, with each other, and even with God. So many families are divided among themselves because of misunderstandings or hurts, inner conflicts torment ourselves and finding forgiveness and letting go of past hurts brings depression and a sense of separation from God and others.

In our world today, this alienation is seen as wars, division among peoples leading to exterminating whole ethnic groups- genocide.

The duty of the ambassador, our call, is to be the presence of Christ in the world and not run from these horrors. But “how” might we take on such a huge mission? One powerful way is to be willing to face our own brokenness and that of others. Well, that might sound even more frightening to many. May we never forget what St Paul tells us “through Christ we can do all things” and in Timothy Paul reminds us “that the Spirit God has given us is not that of a cowardly spirit but one that makes us strong, bold, loving and wise.”

Need help? We all do. Feel free to call me at 973-338-9538 with thoughts or concerns. All sessions are confidential.

– Anna Graziano

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