

27<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time  
October 3, 2010  
Fr. Tom Elliott

# The Lay Apostolate

Habakkuk 1: 2-3; 2: 2-4  
Psalm 95  
2 Timothy 1:6-8, 13-14  
Luke 17:5-10

In 1965, there was one Catholic priest for every 778 Catholics in the United States. In 2003, there was one Catholic priest for every 1,453 Catholics. Prior to Vatican Council II,<sup>1</sup> it was very common for parishes to have multiple priests who took care of most of the ministries in the parish—offering instruction to people interested in becoming Catholic, visiting people in the hospitals and nursing homes, bringing Communion to the sick and homebound, teaching at the schools, etc. This is no longer the image of the Church. Due to the shortage of priests in the United States, as well as the renewal of the Church that happened through Vatican Council II, Catholics today are being challenged to understand the Church and their role in the Church in new ways.

Before Vatican Council II, most Catholics understood the pope and the teaching authority of the Church as the foundation of the Church, dictating laws and rules for people to follow. Priests and religious were seen as the ones doing all the ministry. The role of the laity was rarely ever spoken about and most people view it as one of *receiving* what the Church offered, rather than one of *offering ministry and service*.

God has used Vatican Council II, as well as the shortage of priests, to change the image of the Church, and in many ways to flip it upside down! The laity are now challenged to be sources of service in the Church and in the world, while the teaching authority of the Church is at the service of the Church. The documents of Vatican Council II support this image of the Church.

The laity are called to participate actively in the whole life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind.

-Vatican Council II, *Guadium et Spes*, ¶43

The laity, carrying out [the] mission of the Church, exercise their apostolate therefore in the world as well as in the Church, in the temporal order as well as in the spiritual.

-Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, ¶5

As we prepare to start our 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Stewardship Month next week, I want to mention one specific ministry, or lay apostolate, that needs more volunteers—the Extraordinary Ministers of Communion to the sick and homebound. Sixty or seventy years ago, this was a ministry that was handled entirely by the many priests who worked in each parish. Today, deacons and laity are being challenged to ensure that this important ministry is maintained.

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II took place in the early 1960s.

Many of you may not realize that each week the Eucharist is taken to members of our parish who are sick, homebound, in nursing homes, or in assisted living facilities, and unable to attend Mass. This ministry not only serves the elderly, but anyone who cannot physically make it to church. This might include a temporary absence from church due to an illness or injury, as well as a permanent absence due to age, illness, or handicap. Regardless of the reason why a person cannot attend Mass, we feel it is very important for everyone to have the opportunity to be spiritually nourished by the Eucharist.

For years, a group of very dedicated parishioners ensured that this ministry took place every week. Now, many of those people have either died, are homebound themselves, or have moved on to other ministries. We need new people to accept this ministry. Being an Extraordinary Minister of Communion to the sick and shut-ins means visiting particular people each week and bringing them Communion. It means being a friendly face, a presence that reminds them that they are not forgotten, and a relationship that connects them to their parish. It is an opportunity to feel the unexplainable joy, love, and humility that comes with bringing Christ to others.

While this ministry is, in many ways, a simple ministry, it does require dedication. It takes 1-2 hours a week, on a day and time that works best for you. Joe Reznik coordinates this ministry and will train anyone who is interested. He will also work with you to assign the number of people you want to visit and the time that you want to visit them.

As we begin praying and discerning how God desires to use our time, talent and treasure this year, I ask you to please consider becoming an Extraordinary Minister of Communion to the sick and shut-ins. It's an important and essential ministry in the Church.

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Read Luke 1:39-55 and imagine yourself as Mary, no longer pregnant with Christ, but instead, bringing the Eucharist to someone. Listen to the words of the story in light of yourself and the Eucharist being part of the story. What happens in your heart?
- ✚ Read John 6:47-56. Meditate on what the Eucharist has meant to you personally in your spiritual journey.