

In order to understand this week's gospel we have to look at it
within the context of last week's Gospel.

You might remember that in last week's Gospel Jesus asked his disciples
"Who do people say that I am?"

And they gave all the answers they had heard,
"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah;
some say Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

And then he asks "And who do you say that I am?"

And it's Simon Peter who says, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God."
Jesus says, "Peter, you're right...but flesh and blood has not revealed this to you
But my heavenly Father...You are rock and on this rock I will build my Church."

And then we have today's Gospel...

We don't know how much time elapsed between the two events...
but Matthew puts them right there together.

Jesus begins to tell them what it means to be the messiah...

He will suffer and die and be raised,
And Peter begins to argue with him...

And Jesus says to him...Get behind me Satan...
The same Peter who just a little bit ago is praised,
Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah...is now called the devil...

This Gospel provides a great backdrop to the first point of our vision statement.

We want parishioners who have a personal relationship with Jesus
and have the ability to share their faith with others.

I want to talk about that and in order to get to it
we need to begin with the mission of our Church.

Now I'm not talking about our parish mission statement...

I'm talking about the mission of the larger Church...
What is the primary purpose of the Church.

Fr. James Mallon is the pastor of St. Benedict's Parish in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Fr. Mallon has recently written a book entitled
Divine Renovation: Moving Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission.

In this book he talks about the sinking of the Titanic back in 1912.

2012 was the 100th anniversary of the Titanic disaster.

On the anniversary of the disaster he watched the old Titanic movie:
A Night to Remember.

And he was reminded of this: There were 18 lifeboats on the Titanic...

And when they were dropped from the ship,
there were 412 unused seats in the lifeboats.

And even after the boat sank, and the people were flailing about in the water,
Only two of the lifeboats went back to rescue people.

Then he says this: Why did this happen?

Because the crews of the lifeboat had forgotten the purpose of the lifeboat—
to save people!

And then he says: As I watched the movie

I realized that this is a metaphor for the Church.

We too have forgotten why we exist. We have forgotten our purpose.

So what is that purpose. He says of course we go to the great commission...

The end of Matthews Gospel...Jesus calls the 11 to himself and tells them

“Go and Make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Fr. Mallon points out that in that sentence there are four main verbs: GO, MAKE, BAPTIZE and TEACH...and he says in the original Greek...

(now I don't know Greek so I have to trust him on this)

One of those verbs is the Finite verb and the other three are participle verbs...

And the Finite verb is the hinge of the sentence...the main point....

Whenever he gives this talk he always asks which of those verbs is the finite verb?

Which do you think is the most important?

And they never get it right...And so I ask you: which do you think is the finite verb—the hinge for the rest of the sentence? GO? MAKE? BAPTIZE? Or TEACH?

It's MAKE...more accurately it is MAKE DISCIPLES...all the rest hinges on that.

And it gives us the primary mission of the Church to MAKE DISCIPLES...

Then he says this: It is not so much that the Church has a mission as it is the mission of Jesus has a Church.

So our mission is to make disciples...

We have to commit to growing as disciples in order to make new disciples...

And so we have to be people who know Jesus....not know about him....but know him...

What does that look like?

I've been reflecting on that this week and I want to give you three characteristics that might show you have that personal relationship with Jesus.

The first is this: people who have a personal relationship with Jesus are able to take the scripture stories and connect them with their lives and they can take events in their lives and apply them to the scriptures.

This week and last weeks Gospel is a perfect example.

How many of you have ever done something that was really really good one minute...

And then something really really stupid the next?

A person who has that connection with Jesus might be able to say,

Wow I was just like Peter there.

And so a person who has that personal relationship with Jesus can take the scriptures and connect them to their lives and vice versa.

The second characteristic of someone who has that personal relationship with Jesus is that they are rooted in prayer.

We know that because Jesus was rooted in prayer. How many times in scripture do we hear:

And Jesus went off by himself to pray?

Jesus went up onto the mountain to pray?

Jesus spent the night in prayer?

Jesus got into the boat to pray?

So if we want to be like Jesus...Jesus was all about prayer.

Finally, and the third characteristic of a person who has a personal relationship with Jesus, and it ties in perfectly with our responsorial psalm for today: My soul is thirsting for the Lord my God...The 3rd characteristic is a deep thirst for Jesus.

People who have a personal relationship with Jesus look for opportunities to grow in their faith...

When something like our parish retreat comes around they are anxious to attend...

When an opportunity for spiritual growth is offered they are often the first to sign up...

Because they know Jesus and want to know him better.

And here's the key...It also has to be intentional.

You have to make the decision. You have to say, "I'm gonna do something different because what I'm doing now isn't getting me there."

You know we all lament the fact that many young people are leaving the Church...

Many of your sons and daughters...and they aren't leaving because they disagree with Church doctrine...they are leaving and going someplace else because they find people elsewhere that are like that...People that want their faith to grow...People who want their faith to matter.

They have that personal relationship and are able to talk about it.

And so you might ask yourself, Am I being intentional about my discipleship growth so that someone might see something in me and think: I want to be like that.

We have a great scripture story that tells us about the power of being intentional.

It's in Mark's Gospel chapter 11. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem...to shouts of Hosanna...Hosanna in the highest...and Mark says:

He entered Jerusalem and walked into the temple...He looked around at everything...

So picture that scene...Jesus walks into the temple...and he looks around...

He sees the area for sacrifice...he sees the area for the widows...he sees the place of ritual bathing...He sees the area for teaching...and he sees the moneychangers who allow for people to buy the animals for sacrifice...He looks at everything... And then Mark says this, "but since it was already late, he left the temple and went to Bethany..."

What did Jesus see as he looked around the Temple?

He saw that the Temple had forgotten their mission...What is the Mission of the Temple? To be a house of prayer for all people...and Jesus didn't see that...and so he left for the night.

Now Mark doesn't say what Jesus thought about that night...but I think he thought this..."I've got to do something...I need to bring them back to their purpose..."

And so the next day he comes back and Mark says: "They came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area.

Then he taught them saying, "Is it not written: 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples'? But you have made it a den of thieves."

This wasn't a spur of the moment thing by Jesus...He wanted to make a point...

And he was **very intentional** about how he did...

I think if Jesus walked into most Catholic Churches today he would say: You have forgotten your purpose..you have forgotten your mission.

Mission Beyond is one of the ways we are trying to break up the culture of our parish so that we can get back to our primary mission, that of making disciples.

And that begins with each one of you having a personal relationship with Jesus and being able to talk about that.

And so today, like Simon Peter we have a choice.

We can be the Simon Peter of whom Jesus says: Blessed are you Simon Son of Jonah for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father has....We can be that Simon.

Or we can be the Simon of whom Jesus says, Get behind me Satan...

You have a choice...You can be this Simon...or you can be this Simon...

It's up to you.