

HOMILY

The Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

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Congress recently passed a law that entitles any deceased U.S. veteran to have two uniformed military personnel present to fold and present a flag and to have “Taps” played on the bugle at the end of the service. Who could argue with such a simple honor? There is one little problem. There are very few bugle players around these days. The short supply of brass musicians has caused the congressional mandate to be mitigated. Veterans still have the right to “Taps,” but it can be played on a CD player during their funeral.

In order to keep the ceremony a little more stately, a whole new instrument has been invented. This instrument looks like a bugle, but instead of brass keys and open airways, this bugle is designed around a CD player. When the musician hits the play button on his phony bugle, a red and green light comes on. The “musician” then has five seconds to get the bugle to his or her mouth before the recording starts to play. Not surprisingly, the bugler faces away from the mourners so they cannot see the flashing lights inside the bell of the fake instrument.

In our culture, even when we try to do something positive and notable, it is all about appearance. We substitute style for substance over and over again. We prefer the canned perfection of these fake, false notes to the real performance of a fragile human being offering a genuine final tribute.

When Jesus called his disciples, he did not call them to a course survey or to a graduate seminar. Jesus called his disciples to active practice. Immediately after Matthew was called, he got up from his everyday routine and walked on. He had people to see, places to go, things to do. Has your discipleship gotten to that level yet? As Jesus called his disciples, healed those in need, taught those who listened, he always asked for some active response. Matthew, and before him Simon Peter

and Andrew, James and John, were asked to make a move in order to accept their new status as disciples on a mission. They got up, they left their established routines, and they stepped out onto a new road.

The question needs to be asked of our own faith journey: Where and when do we decide that our faith, our discipleship journey, is to be here week after week to sit and soak and do nothing more?

President Charles de Gaulle of the French Republic once contentedly sighed, “Church is the only place you could go and somebody talks but you don’t have to say anything back.” In too many churches, discipleship is defined as attendance, not participation. Woody Allen is noted for saying that ninety per cent of life is just showing up. That is not the case for discipleship. We have **not** been called just to “show up.”

We have been called to participate in Jesus’ life—in the life of his church—to continue his story. In the phrase of Julian of Norwich, you and I have been “oned with God.” When we are oned with God, when we are teamed with God, we are oned with Christ, oned with the Church and with one another. Plato understood the human species was designed by God for participation, not mere attendance. Plato declared that human reason was nothing less than our ability to participate in the divine mind. Let me put this another way: Disciples of Jesus have been called to dramatize the way of Jesus. Drama comes from the Greek word which means “to do.”

Disciples of Jesus lead lives of drama because they do their faith. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a *verb*, not merely a **noun**. To be a drama disciple is to be a participant, not just an observer who sits and soaks and does nothing more. To walk with Jesus is to live in expectancy, not just expectation. Our hope for the future in religion, marriage, world affairs, economics, peace—our hope in each one of these areas is changing from being stagnant **nouns** to becoming dramatic *verbs*.

Jesus taught his disciples to live with expectancy, not expectation. Expectancy is alive and active. Expectation is passive. He taught us to be dramatic agents of action from the moment each is called. The Body of Christ depends upon our drama, our activity, our participation in order to remain vital and alive.

Our kids may know the language of participation better than we do. The "gotta have it" game in 2007 was the Nintendo Wii. For those who may not be familiar, Wii is spelled capital **W** and two lower case **ii**s. Before the Wii came on the scene, everything was dubbed "**I**." Everything was about the first person singular: **i**Pods, **i**Phones, **i**Tune, **i**Toys. Our self-centered, self-engaging, self-absorbed culture was perfectly okay with that. The good thing of the Wii game system is that it is a perfect combination of singular solidarity and communal commitment. It takes two **i**s to make a **Wii**. This interactive, participatory, get-up-and-move system involves individuals and teams in ways never before imagined. The hottest thing in nursing homes is now **Wii**.

In a recent visit with youth of the world, Pope Benedict was asked by a 17-year-old student, "What in your opinion are the greatest challenges you see that we will face in our time, and what does the Lord expect of us?" We all ask ourselves what the Lord asks of us. It seems to me that the great challenge of our time is secularization. That is, a way of living and presenting the world as if God did not exist.

There is a desire to reduce God to a sentiment, as if he were not an objective reality. As a result, everyone makes his or her own plan of life. We must make God present again in our society. We must realize that we are creatures. That there is a God who created us and that living in accordance with his will is not dependence but a gift of love that makes us alive. The first point is to know God, to know him better and better, to recognize that God is in my life and that God has a place.

We cannot be alone in building this just and righteous life but must journey on in the company of good and upright friends, companions with whom we can experience that God does exist and that it is beautiful to walk with God and to walk in the great company of the Church, which presents to us God who speaks, who acts, who accompanies us.

It's time to stop caring about appearance and start caring about substance, reality and truth. It's time to tune our lives to Jesus, the Christ, to God's perfect pitch. It's time to start singing the praises of the Light of the World, the first, the

brightest, and the last light. It's time for us to play our song, even when the notes are fragile and faltering and sometimes fall flat. It's time to play our own instrument that God gave us with one another. And as we blow our bugles, may the sound awaken the world and may his spirit fill the hearts of all.