

Ordinary 3.CMA Homily 1.21.24

On the top of many helicopters is a piece of hardware that secures the main rotor blades to the mast or drive shaft. That piece of hardware is called the “Jesus Nut.” Without the Jesus Nut the rotors wouldn’t spin, and the helicopter couldn’t fly. If the Jesus Nut becomes loose in flight, it could be catastrophic for the helicopter and its crew.

It’s amazing that just one piece of hardware, which is about the size of our fist, is essential to keeping a helicopter operational.

In today’s first reading, the reluctant prophet Jonah was commanded by the Lord to preach conversion to the sinful Ninevites. Jonah did everything he could to run away from that responsibility. Jonah was afraid that he would be rejected by the Ninevites, harmed, or even killed if he told them to repent. Through a series of almost comical events, Jonah ended up preaching to the Ninevites. Shortly after he began his preaching, everyone repented – the citizens as well as the political leaders of the land, including the king. Jonah’s message was so powerful that even the working animals like oxen and mules were covered in sackcloth and ashes (Jonah 3:8) – a sign of their repentance and turning back to the Lord.

One man, Jonah, had that kind of effect on an entire city which was so large and so populated, it took three days to walk from one end to another.

In the gospel, we hear Jesus calling four men to follow him. He calls Simon Peter, Andrew his brother, and the brothers James and John to be his Apostles. Literally, the word “apostle” means one who is sent to share the Good News.

History shows that these men had a profound effect on others. Their singular preaching led to the conversion of innumerable people. Their work is what laid the foundation for our Catholic Church to be a billion members strong today.

Tradition tells us that St. Peter evangelized all of Rome. St. Andrew preached to folks in Greece and Turkey. St. James shared the Good News in Spain and Portugal. St. John ministered throughout Asian Minor and was particularly successful at Ephesus. Each of these men used their gifts and talents in a singular way with profound results. But their ministry, when put together, led to an exponential spread of Christianity throughout Europe and Asia Minor. Even today, the effect of their preaching is felt worldwide.

The lesson of these readings is clear. Our singular, humble efforts to share the Good News of Jesus and to live the gospel can bring about extraordinary results. Jesus speaks to that possibility in the story of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. With just a few loaves and a couple of fish brought forth by a poor, humble peasant boy, Jesus fed thousands.

When I was a boy, I received an allowance of 50 cents a week for doing chores around the house. Each week, following the example of my parents and how they contributed to the church’s offertory, I gave 15 cents to the collection. When my allowance increased to \$1 a week, I gave 25 cents to the collection. My sisters and brothers did the same. Our meager and simple effort to support our parish had a profound effect when combined with the sacrifices of all who came to Mass each Sunday.

Each Lent, every student in our school was given a little box. Since most children back then gave up eating candy during Lent, it was suggested we put our candy money in that box. At the end of Lent, the money would be sent to the priests and sisters who worked in the missions in Africa or Central America. While my individual contributions were meager, when combined with the 700 students from our school and multiplied by the well over 100 Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, our ability to help missionary efforts abroad would be profound.

This weekend, the parishes throughout the Diocese of St. Petersburg are hearing about the **Catholic Ministry Appeal** in the homily at Mass. The **Catholic Ministry Appeal** is the annual campaign which

raises funds used to support the education of our seminarians. It is the main source of support for Pinellas Hope – which helps individuals and families transition to safe, affordable, and permanent housing. The **Catholic Ministry Appeal** makes education in our Catholic schools possible. It also enables Faith Formation programs in our parishes to thrive. It is what keeps our diocesan radio station – WBVM – on air and evangelizing hundreds of thousands of Catholics and non-Catholics in our area about our great faith. The **Catholic Ministry Appeal** supports marriage preparation sessions for couples preparing for the Sacrament of Matrimony in the church. And it helps sustain and fortify those already married.

Most of us could never underwrite any of these ministries by ourselves. But through our individual efforts and with the combined effort of everyone who is gathered in this church, we can have a profound effect on literally thousands of others. Our singular effort, combined with the efforts of those next to you, in front of you, and behind you, can be what holds together our ministries in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

After hearing the example I used at the beginning of this reflection about the helicopter and the Jesus Nut which keeps it all together, I'm guessing there is more than one person here today who is saying the following under their breath or maybe out loud: "Father, I think you're the nut that keeps all this together." To some degree, I guess you are right. Furthermore, **all** of us help to keep together the varied ministries which happen throughout our diocese.

Please join me in supporting the **Catholic Ministry Appeal** by making your personal gift or pledge. It is part of my annual tithing, and I will be making my gift to this appeal next weekend. In anticipation of our in-pew effort for the **Catholic Ministry Appeal** which will take place next weekend, I am asking that, for the next several days, you pray about and reflect on what God is calling you to give to this appeal.

Like the Jesus Nut on the helicopter that keeps everything together and operational, your gift does the same for our sisters and brothers in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. Without your gift, the gospel message won't go anywhere.

Please bring your pledge card to church next weekend when all of us, each and every family in our parish, will have an opportunity to give or to pledge to this excellent cause.

Amen? Amen!