

**TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**Year C      October 13, 2013**

**Theme: Where are the other nine?**

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This has been quite a discouraging and disappointing week.

Our three Catholic schools – St. Paul's, St. Joseph's and Madonna brought in a nationally known speaker on the subject of bullying for special programs for our students and their parents.

The students participated as part of the school day but for the special parents' program in the evening we had a grand total of 11 parents – 11 for all three schools.

Tuesday evening I had our weekly bible study and there were six people out of 1,700 parishioners in attendance.

For Wednesday's "New Catholic Session" we had plenty of team members present to assist but only two adult participants and three children.

We have about eighty Catholic families with children in St. Paul Grade School or Madonna High School – they apparently hold Catholic values as important enough to pay for this parochial education for their children.

Yet most of these same families do not value the central Catholic belief in the centrality of Sunday Eucharist because the majority of them rarely if ever participate with us in this liturgy.

Similarly, other Catholic families who do not send their children to our Catholic schools do not participate in any religious education – our Family Fundamentals Program – and others who are registered are quite lackadaisical in their participation in that program.

Our catechists who volunteer their time early Sunday mornings are frustrated at how some children come one week then are gone for three, come back for two and are gone again for two.

Then Thursday I made the mistake of running the totals for mass attendance so far this year and compared these to our total parish membership:

About 35 out of 100 Catholics regularly come to Sunday mass – a 35% participation rate.

I guess in comparison to the Gospel this weekend I really shouldn't feel too awfully bad: that means 3.5 out of ten people are coming to mass on a given Sunday.

Jesus himself got only one out of 10 lepers to come back and give thanks!

Jesus asked: **“Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”**

If Jesus became disgusted and disappointed by the poor rate of response among the healed lepers Luke's Gospel does not report it.

He seems to go on with his ministry unfazed and unperturbed.

Yet, where were the other nine?

Where are all the other Catholics -- why don't the other 65% of them worship with us?

Why don't Catholic families make Sunday Eucharist a higher priority than soccer or baseball practice or sleeping over at friends or just sleeping in?

Why is there such small participation in anything but sports – bible study, classes, meetings, community events?

Now we might engage in the usual bashing and accusation of misplaced priorities.

Pope Francis, however, has been leading the way in suggesting we should take a different approach, a more humble, more repentant approach that accepts responsibility for at least part of the blame.

Perhaps many have quit participating in the church because what the church has been offering has been irrelevant to their real lives in the real world.

Maybe we have been talking about things that don't matter, or talking in ways that do not connect, do not ring true to what makes sense to people, especially to the young.

Maybe our subject matter has been what we wanted to talk about rather than what they needed to hear about.

Recently Pope Francis told a magazine editor: *“Instead of being just a church that welcomes and receives by keeping the doors open, let us try also to be a church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. The ones who quit sometimes do it for reasons that, if properly understood and assessed, can lead to a return. But that takes audacity and courage.”*

Pope Francis has also recognized that rigorous insistence on Church doctrines have turned many a Catholic away from their former home: laws on divorce and remarriage, on contraception, on abortion, on gay marriage and other issues of morality.

The Pope has noted that perhaps we need to be less insistent and more balanced.

He has poignantly noted: *“The confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better.”*

And while granting that some of our young Catholic families may in fact have misplaced priorities when soccer and other sports always seem to come before Sunday Eucharist or Sunday school, we also have to admit that we may not have done a real good job with the religious formation of some of the parents in these families.

The religious education they were given in the years immediately following the second Vatican Council may be lacked the substance they needed.

Our challenge now is what is called the new evangelization or how do we reach these young Catholics with the Gospel message anew.

### **“Where are the other nine?”**

With a 90% failure to return rate the temptation was surely for Jesus to be disgusted and disappointed and tempted to lash out at those nine ingrates.

Again we have no evidence in Luke’s Gospel of Jesus doing any such thing.

He seems to have carried on, as we will hear next Sunday, **“to teach them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.”**

So, until then, I’ll keep on praying and try not to become weary if you will!