

Last Sunday I watched the Superbowl. And as you know part of the celebration is watching all the commercials. Some were funny, some were silly, but there were some advertisements that tried to tie their products into a deeper life message. A beer company used a story of big Clydesdale horse sheltering and nurturing a young bald eagle that fell out of its nest -until it could take off from the horse's back and soar away (Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Free Bird"). A potato chip company told the story of a family of potato farmers and their multi-generational legacy of hard work tilling the soil. And there several weight-loss drugs touting life-transformation. The ads were a stretch logically, but they were well crafted to stir our emotions to desire the virtues and future they evoked – suggesting that their products were life-changers.

“I have come not to abolish but to fulfill the [Law].” Holiness is God living in us, not our own achievement. It's Jesus who fulfills the Law. As He lives in us, so we can act as He acts. The power of peace, chastity, honesty, etc. comes to us by God's grace, as we open

ourselves up to it. So, that means The Sermon on the Mount, (part of which we just heard as our Gospel), is not just a set of rigorous rules we must follow and probably fail at. It's more a description of what a person transformed by Christ looks and feels like! The Sermon on the Mount is an advertisement for the new life Jesus offers!

“You have heard it said . . . You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgement. But I say to you, whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca’ is liable to judgment. You have heard it said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’. But I say to you everyone who looks at a woman in lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” This is not an impossible ideal, but the normal Christian life -- IF that life is filled with God's grace, as it's meant to be. Normal (not necessarily typical) Christians have authority over their anger, sexuality, speech. Again, what is offered to us by Christ is not rules, but a new life. When Jesus' life fills us, our anger fades, our lust weakens, our love for others increases, we speak the truth in love.

Think back to the Super Bowl commercials – or other ads you’ve seen. They often are subtly saying, “Use our product, drink our beer, eat our chips, take our drug, and you will be this kind of person. You will have this kind of lifestyle.” But in our experience is there really much connection between the beer we drink, the truck or sports car we drive, and our virtue and happiness?

Jesus says, “Without me you can do nothing.” We can’t do the things God wants us to do on our own, at least not very well. But with Him . . . there’s a whole new life available to us. So, yes, I’m comparing Jesus to a marketing executive. But the question of faith really is a matter of: do we believe and live as though Jesus’ promise is truer and has any more weight than a beer commercial – or not?

What Jesus is offering (in the words of Galatians 5), are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness . . . self-control.” Sounds like the Sermon on the Mount. Maybe we have doubts. Maybe our Christian life hasn’t changed us

much. But then maybe we haven't yet really bought into what Jesus is selling, that is, the life of grace. Maybe we're still just looking or have just taken it out for a test drive.

Facilitating encounters with Jesus that deepen our life with Him is what we're supposed to be all about as a parish. And it's what Lent is all about – Ash Wednesday is this week. Toward that end today I want to tell you about a couple ways the parish is offering to help form a relationship with Jesus and let His life into us more.

On March 23-25 there will be a Lenten Mission. This Lent it will be at St. Monica at 6:30 each night (we're only having one mission for the family – like Fr. Sichko in October here). Fr. Michael Joyce, a Carmelite priest, will be giving the retreat. The purpose of these three days is to transform our relationships with Jesus.

Another tool for growing in Christ will be this Lent's book giveaway. Pope Leo said one of his favorite spiritual books is The Practice of the Presence of God, by Br. Lawrence, a simple Carmelite lay brother in

Paris in the 17th century known for his holiness. [I guess there's a Carmelite theme this Lent]. This short but classic work is Br. Lawrence's description of how he developed his intimacy with God by means of a simple interior conversation he carried on with God in all circumstances throughout his day. I hope the books will arrive by Ash Wednesday. If not next weekend. In addition, there will be the usual Stations of the Cross and soup supers every Friday night at 6:30. The Penance Service will be on Thursday. March 12 at 6:30 at Sacred Heart and 10:00 Saturday morning, March 14 at St. Monica.

So, how's that "Sermon on the Mount-Lifestyle" going? Because that is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about – a new way of living. Please pray hard about coming to this mission Lent. We all need deeper conversion and that new life of grace Jesus wants to give us. I'm just asking you to risk a few hours this Lent to open yourself up to that possibility.