

Archbishop Smith: Parked or Sent?

The parking lot at St. Joseph's Basilica is getting a bit of an upgrade. When that was announced at mass this past weekend, it certainly caught people's attention. Anything having to do with parking is always sure to arouse interest. We never seem to have enough parking space, whether at our churches or in the city generally. We rely to a great extent upon our vehicles, and we need places to park them.

The concept of the parking lot helps illustrate something we as followers of Christ are facing on an increasingly frequent basis. As Christians, we are finding ourselves tempted to park not our vehicles but our faith. Faith is the air we breathe. In the light of faith, we see and interpret reality correctly and learn the right way to live, both individually and communally. Yet, more and more, from a society that is allergic to the truth and beauty of the Gospel, we get the message to park our faith, keep it private, separate it from our engagement with society and remove it from discussions in the public square. In this kind of environment, we ourselves might be tempted to park our faith, to keep our Catholic identity private, for fear of negative reaction.

With this in mind, consider that Pope Francis has designated October of this year as Extraordinary Missionary Month. From the beginning of his pontificate, the Holy Father has repeatedly called for us to recognize and own what it means to be baptized. Baptism, he insists, makes us missionaries. We often think of missionary work as entrusted to priests and nuns who go away to far-off lands to preach the Gospel. True, but we also, each and every one of us, is called to be a missionary. Baptism unites us to Christ in such a way that his life becomes the principle of our own. Jesus came to us because he was sent by the Father. In his turn, Jesus sends his followers into the world with the message of the Gospel. The Church, the Pope says, is permanently on mission, which means that each member of the Church is permanently called to be a missionary.

The theme the Pope has chosen for this month is: "Baptized and sent!" Let's note carefully that it is not "Baptized and parked." The Christian is not called to sit idle, with the engine turned off. On the contrary, we are called to be on the move, with the engine fully engaged. That engine is our faith.

But, what is faith? In the Gospel passage proclaimed on Sunday (cf. Luke 17:5-10), we heard the disciples cry out to Jesus, "Increase our faith!" Jesus responded, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." In this brief exchange, Jesus is teaching that faith, even if it is small, has power to do the impossible. We understand this when we reflect that by the act of faith we surrender our lives to Christ and allow him to be active in and through us. Jesus is Lord of the impossible, so if by faith we open our lives fully to his power, what to human beings is impossible becomes very possible

indeed.

We also heard on Sunday from St. Paul's second letter to Timothy, where he wrote: "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." In other words, this spirit of power that is ours by Baptism is not meant to be parked, separated out from our daily existence, left behind and idle while we get on with the business of life. Rather, it is given to animate our entire existence and impel us out into the world with the message of life and hope that is the Gospel.

Extraordinary Missionary Month provides a good opportunity to ask the Lord where he is sending us on mission. We don't have to travel far to be missionaries. There is enough missionary work in our families and neighbourhoods to keep us busy for a life time. Allow me to suggest an idea: we all know people who, for whatever, reason, have separated themselves from the life of the Church. Many of them are in our own families. Might the Lord be sending us to them, in order to invite them back to the community of faith?

Baptized and sent; not baptized and parked. Let's keep the parking lots for our vehicles and not our faith. As did the disciples, let us ask the Lord for the faith we need to be the missionaries he has called and made us to be.