

Homily - Year 3 C - January 27, 2019

Have you ever heard of football? That's a really dumb question to ask especially now as we are on the verge of Super Bowl. Coverage of football means tv, food, excitement, friends, gatherings or parties, late-breaking news, blogs, analyses beyond imagination, the odds, and who knows what else. "What are you doing for Super Bowl this year" is asked just like "what are you doing for Christmas?" The AFC and the NFC competing for the NFL championship.

In the early 1980's there was the United States Football League established by a group of business men, including Donald Trump. This group tried to tap into this football hunger in the USA and established a league that would play when the NFL was not playing. It had all the right ingredients for success but failed after a few years.

So, why does the NFL continue to flourish while the USFL couldn't get off the ground? Well, simply put, enthusiasm breeds enthusiasm.

There is also another organization like the NFL that continues to grow despite all odds. We call that organization the Church.

By all human measures, the Church has nothing going for it. Twelve men with a leader who was crucified, died, and was buried. They had no business plan, no financial backing. The religion made unheard-of demands like loving your neighbor and your enemies, taking care of the sick, worshipping as a community on the Lord's day. Lots of activities that would take up individuals' time, resources, and talent. Human standards should nix the Church. So, there must be some element of divine.

How could such an organization last for more than 2,000 years? That's a hard question to answer, but I think that we can find an answer in the Super Bowl. Enthusiasm for the activity, seeing value in the product, excitement among the participants, and, most of all, passing on traditions of the game itself. People want to pass their belief and their enthusiasm for football.

Likewise, part of the continuity of the Church can be found in the enthusiasm of its members. Those early disciples were enthusiastic for their leader Jesus, especially after he proved his divinity by rising from the dead. Secondly, their enthusiasm was founded in truth, Jesus Christ himself the source of all truth. Those who listened to the early disciples and who accepted their preaching were moved by their enthusiasm and the value of the content of their preaching.

Look at today's gospel and first reading. Ezra and Jesus are both filled with the Spirit. They are both reading the content of their faith from the sacred scrolls. The listeners were rapt in attention. Ezra's were enthralled because they had not heard these words in many years. Jesus' listeners were likewise enthralled because there was something special about this man.

So, how do we translate that into 2019 terms? Our product continues to be Jesus Christ with the fullness of his teaching as understood and taught over the centuries. That has not changed. What has changed is our enthusiasm. Just as the US Football League had a similar product, but lacked enthusiasm, so too perhaps our enthusiasm for our faith has waned over the years. If we were truly enthusiastic about our faith, there would be no need to merge and/or close churches and parishes.

Think back on how your own faith developed. Without a doubt, there were people in your lives whose devotion and faith rubbed off on you. They were dedicated to their faith, freely spoke about their faith, and wanted to make sure that it was transmitted to you. Faith, just like any other value, is transmitted by one generation actively and enthusiastically passing that faith on to the next generation. If I may use a trite comparison, if grandma doesn't pass on the pasta and sauce recipes to her daughter, her granddaughter will never know the recipe and perhaps will never know that it even existed. The same applies to faith.

Every time we gather as a body of Catholics, as here today at Mass, we have a golden opportunity to investigate how well we are passing on that message. True, the divinity of the Church has kept the Church going all these years. But that divinity is entrusted to human beings to be kept burning brightly and enthusiastically. This burning may seem to be dwindling, but it is ever present. We should be intent on making sure that the light of faith is kept alive. Yes, we may have faith deep down in our hearts, but that faith needs to be spoken both in words and in actions. If the words and actions are missing, then the faith, just like grandma's pasta sauce recipe, will likewise disappear.

May the closing words of today's gospel "this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" be fulfilled in each one of our lives.