From the Desk of Fr. Neil...

NO-RISK EVANGELISM

While driving, I often like to read the signs and other messages around me. I recently saw a homemade banner hanging from a freeway overpass that simply read, “U Need Jesus.” I first thought to myself, “This is true, I do need Jesus.” Of course this is clear to me as a Christian. The need for Jesus, however, is not going to be so clear to the perhaps the thousands of others who drive under that sign who do not know him.

This type of evangelism is probably at best minimally effective. It may cause a few to consider its declaration. Hopefully it doesn't cause anyone to take their eyes off of the road for long! I suppose even if it does awaken a few, it can be considered to have accomplished its purpose.

What about this sort of evangelism? Is it effective? This style of telling people about Jesus I call “No-Risk Evangelism.” It is no-risk because, other than maybe getting caught for hanging the sign, those who put it there are really taking the easy way out when it comes to sharing the Gospel. To say “U Need Jesus” is such a truncated formulation of the Gospel that it is, for the most part, highly ineffective.

Not only that, we are called to be more than anonymous evangelists. To hang a sign by night is not building relationships with others. It is not telling people about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not coming into contact with lost sinners and sharing the Good News of salvation in Christ. It is not even giving them a reason for needing Jesus!

People need Jesus because they are dead in their sins and trespasses and need a savior if they desire to enter into the kingdom of heaven and not suffer eternally apart from God. None of that is conveyed on a freeway overpass sign. Even if that entire message were to be posted, this is not what we find in the bible when reading about the acts of the apostles of Jesus and their evangelistic efforts.

Starting with Jesus, we find the complete opposite of no-risk evangelism. Jesus walked with people. He was constantly under the watchful eye of Pharisees and Sadducees as he taught in the temple and in houses. He dined with people in their homes. He touched lepers, blind men and children. Jesus’ method of sharing the message of the kingdom of heaven was very intimate. He had enough trouble at times for being so accessible that he climbed into boats and floated in water deep enough to keep from being too crowded.

St. Paul travelled thousands of miles to spread the gospel. He established churches in many
cities and then he kept in touch with them via written correspondence. On Mars Hill Paul stood up in the Areopagus and preached boldly and publicly. In the Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 1, Paul writes how he longed to see them so that he could impart some spiritual gift to strengthen them. Paul, Peter and the others we read about in scripture were so transformed by the gospel that they lived it out by being as accessible as they could be to others.

The command to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them must include some sort of intimate contact. Once disciples are made, they are called to be actively and frequently in the church, surrounded by other Christians.

To many, sharing the Christian faith is not easy. Face-to-face discussions are not easy for many people. This is probably why the church has a difficult time influencing the culture today. We don't have a presence other than a church building and a sign out front.

Paul insisted that he was not ashamed of the Gospel. He knew it to be the power of God for salvation to everyone that believed. (Romans 1) He knew he was the messenger of the gospel and not the power behind it. The power of its efficacy comes through the Holy Spirit. We need not be ashamed or afraid to share the gospel, because Christ has already endured the cross and suffered the shame for his preaching. And we are called to boldly share that same message.

**SHORT STUDY**

**CHRISTMAS AND THE LOGOS**

As Christmas rapidly approaches, we are once again contemplating the great act of mercy and grace that God did for us. We call it many things: Christmas, The Nativity of our Lord, The Birthday of Christ or the Incarnation. One of the most stunning texts describing Jesus and His laying aside His glory and condescending to our lowly position is found in John’s Gospel. In chapter 1:1-14, the mystery of Christ and His incarnation are described in graphic detail. Many at St. Mary Magdalene hear this read weekly as a sort of add-on to our service. As an aside, the priest used to say the “Last Gospel” in a low voice as a devotional as he and the other servers retired to the sacristy after mass. Somehow it was pulled from its original place and time of use sometime in the early 16th century and stuck into our service after the final blessing and dismissal.

Be that as it may, it has been placed where everyone can hear it, (probably in an effort to not let anything be done privately or secretly by the priest) so that everyone is reminded weekly of just who we worship and why. Jesus Christ, according to John, was “in the beginning.” He was in the beginning before the creation of the world. Moreover, Christ was with the Father (with God) at the time of creation, and He was involved in creation. And finally as John says, He was God. He was in the beginning. He was with God and He was God.

Jesus Christ is the Word spoken of in John’s Gospel. Word, (Logos in Greek) is difficult to clearly translate into English. We derive our word logic from logos, so we can see how Christ can be the logic, the mind, the same thinking or reasoning as the Father. This is not just to say that Christ thinks God’s thoughts after Him. Christ is thinking the very thoughts of God since He is God.

On the other hand there is an outward implication as well with the word logos. Logos can mean a word as embodying a conception or idea. It signifies a saying, of God. The Ten Commandments are called in the Greek, οἱ δέκα λόγοι, "the ten words" (Exodus 34:28), and
hence the familiar term decalogue. Notice the root logos in Decalogue? It is further used of discourse: either of the act of speaking, of skill and practice in speaking or of continuous speaking. The word logos points directly to Genesis 1, where the act of creation is effected by God speaking. God spoke the creation into existence. The idea of God, who is in his own nature hidden, revealing himself in creation, is the root of the Logos-idea.

So this Christmas rather than the shallow forms of the commercialization of Christmas, with decorations and other things that have no relation to Jesus Christ, think again about the Logos, the Word of God, who came to dwell with us once and will come again at the end of the age, this time with the cry of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the sound of the trumpet of God.

Let us pray that God fills our hearts with the same steadfast commitment to our Christian beliefs as He did with Bishop Ambrose that our life’s work may also be a testimony to our faith in Christ.

Read the Book of John 5:17 through 5:47.

**ORDO CALENDAR ACTIVITIES**

**COMMEMORATE SAINT AMBROSE**

Saint Ambrose is one of the four original doctors of the Church and is commemorated on December 7th. He was the Bishop of Milan and became one of the most important theological figures of the 4th century.

Ambrose was born around 340 AD to a Roman Christian family. He grew up in Trier, Belgic Gaul (Germany). Ambrose studied law, literature and rhetoric in Rome. Ambrose lived in Milan, and was made Consular Prefect (Governor) of Liguria and Emilia around 372. Ambrose remained Governor until 374. After the former Bishop of Milan died, Ambrose attended the election to prevent any uproar between the Nicene Church and the Arians. While giving an address, the assembly began calling for him to become the next bishop. Being neither baptized nor trained in theology, Ambrose refused to become a bishop but our Lord would have His way. Within a week’s time, Ambrose was baptized, ordained and duly consecrated Bishop of Milan on December 7, 374. Ambrose was known to spend most of his life defending our Christian beliefs against the Arians. As Bishop, he donated all of his land and gave his money to the poor. This made him widely popular and often times more politically powerful than even the emperor.

Let us pray that God fills our hearts with the same steadfast commitment to our Christian beliefs as He did with Bishop Ambrose that our life’s work may also be a testimony to our faith in Christ.

All Women are invited to attend their Annual Christmas Party and Gift Exchange, Wednesday December 6th at 7:00pm, at the Edlin home. Plan on attending and bring a friend or family member. Look for more information on this merry event in the narthex.

**WOMEN’S DEVOTIONAL**

Each month we have a special time of ministry to and for all the ladies of the church. We call it the Women’s Devotional. It is a quiet and supportive time to share prayer needs, pray together, and discuss and learn from the bible some truths that help in living our Christian walk as we fellowship together.
On December 3rd we will complete our devotional on the Joy of the Lord. Starting January 7th, we will discover the purpose of a Christian life/lifestyle. In February, we will explore the biblical means to affect real life change.

We have a cozy new room in the Parish Hall for you to bring bible, coffee, tea; on the first Sunday of the month from 9:15am to 10:00 am. Do come and be blessed and a blessing to others. All ladies are encouraged to start the Advent season in prayer and fellowship with one another.

**MEN’S DEVOTIONAL**

All men are encouraged to meet on the first Sunday of the month at 9:15am in the Church for a Bible devotion followed by Morning Prayer.

**MEN’S FELLOWSHIP LUNCHEON & CHRISTMAS PREPARATION**

All men of the church are invited to lunch at “The Wall” restaurant in Orange on Saturday, December 2nd from Noon to 1:30pm. It should be a great time for fellowship. Anyone planning to help Fr. Neil with Christmas preparations in the Narthex, please plan on staying an additional 30 minutes.

The women will be meeting in the Parish Hall that same time to car pool to the Gem Fair at the OC Fairgrounds. Wives, it’s a perfect time to drop the hubby off and do a little shopping with the girls.

**TREE TRIMMING MAY ADD TO THE WAISTLINE**

Well, it’s that time again and we will help in trimming the Narthex Christmas tree after the 10:00 service on December 3rd. The Guild will be serving a wonderful selection of Christmas treats to enjoy while we decorate. Grab a cup of coffee or a hot cocoa, a Christmas goodie and join your Church family in the Christmas festivities.

**ALL CHURCH CHRISTMAS CAROLING THROUGH THE ORANGE CIRCLE**

Do you feel like a good old fashion Christmas? Join us in the Narthex at 11:30 on December 10th as we stroll through Old Town Orange singing traditional Christmas Carols to merchants and shoppers. Be sure to wear good walking shoes. We will be singing for about 45 minutes then eating at the Blue Frog. You are welcome to bring a friend or just collect one on the way to sing along with.

**KID’S CORNER**

**CHILDREN’S CHRISTMAS PROCESSION**

Teachers Mattie and Carla Mackessy and Giana Defusco continue to carry on with our Children’s Program. Parents please let us know which service your family will be attending so we can plan for our Children’s Christmas Procession. Watch for announcements in the Narthex.

**OLD TYME CRAFT FAIR & FASHION BOUTIQUE A SMASHING SUCCESS**

Thanks to everyone who either participated in or purchased items at our Craft Fair & Fashion Boutique. More than a $1,000.00 was made and all of these proceeds will be distributed to our two Outreach missions: Mary’s Kitchen and our Church Mission in Venezuela.