

Look Up (by Deacon Jaycee Napoles)

After my ordination to the Diaconate last November, I stayed at my parents' house for a week before moving into the local parish presbytery. I hadn't stayed at my parents' house for longer than a few days since entering the seminary, and a week at home seemed like a month. At first mum thought it was a good idea, however by the end of the week she was even happier to see me out. At home I felt relaxed and spoiled. Being at home also gave me a chance to reflect on what had inspired me to follow God's call to the Priesthood. In the late 90's and early noughties we didn't have the superhero genre present in today's movie industry. However, we did have Captain Planet, the Power Rangers and Tobey Maguire's Spider-Man. I can't recall exact names but what left an impression on me in my teens weren't blockbuster main characters but locals helping out locals (Vinnies, the Legion of Mary and volunteers).

There is an old axiom which says that the only way to learn virtue is to see it in action. This is a saying everybody understands, because from a young age we all learn by looking up; looking up to people we hold as examples of virtue. The Catholic Church has taken this ancient axiom to heart, whereby the Church spends most of the year reminding us that saints (people of virtue) exist and have lived among us, and that virtue and holiness can be found everywhere. Saints are just people who move beyond complacency and self-preservation and whose actions and good works are guided by the hands of Christ.

Today's Gospel reminds us of our gifts we have received from the Lord - gifts which when used can inspire and build up the Kingdom of God. These gifts are the source of joy for us, as we witness and experience how other people welcome them and use them to do good. Jesus' words are clear: "no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us." In our community, there are a great variety of riches and therefore more possibilities to rise above life's struggles. The great Catholic American, Dorothy Day, who faced harrowing miseries overcame them by doing little-every-day and ordinary things virtuously and quietly. Dorothy says that "we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time" and elsewhere she says, "I have long since come to believe that people never mean half of what they say, and that it is best to disregard their talk and judge only their actions." These words have their foundations in Jesus' message that "by their fruits you will know them." Additionally, Jesus encourages us to recognise that he works in hidden ways, in and through the hearts of our neighbor. Every action however small or sublime is perceived by God. Thus, anything we do if motivated by love has an eternal value as well as giving birth to a new love into our world. Today's gospel invites us to value the actions done by others because they are essentially Holy Spirit inspired. These actions strengthen the bonds of communion with all in the community, urging souls to pray for one another and learning each one's specific way of opening their hearts to Christ and his prompting.

The effects of the contrary are illustrated colorfully by Jesus. When we are concerned that some of our actions might be scandalous we are indirectly naming that our actions have communal/social impact. We know that we have weaknesses but we diligently strive to overcome them and try prevent them from harming others. We are reminded that among those who look up to us are children. Children, as we know, look for good role models,

however they can also encounter bad ones. In our community we need to also consider those who are taking their first steps in the faith. I've learnt that there are pearls of wisdom from so many who have preceded us: from their effort to know their weaknesses and from their willingness to uproot them by seeking and accepting good counsel. The path of a believer is not travelled alone and therefore how important it is to have good spiritual accompaniment. Let us encourage each other to advance with joy on the path to holiness, inspiring young ones by our actions because the only way to learn virtue is to see it in action.