

BULLETIN -- OCTOBER 22

Congratulations, Lindgren family! Parishioners Cathy and Tim Lindgren have this past week served as the Grand Rapids Co-Chair Couple for Holy Family Radio's Fall Pledge Drive. This is admiring recognition of their deep involvement in both parish and area Catholic and community activities. And then, there's their daughter and our parishioner Clare Lindgren, who not only won the Grand Rapids Right to Life essay prize, but also the *National!* Thank you, Lindgrens, from all of your fellow parishioners, for your daily creative witness to life and faith!

Just so you know, your generosity to CSA continues to produce benefits for your parish as well. Since we have met our target for the 2017-18 campaign, the overage being returned to us this month has arrived in a check for **\$1,148.33**. Thank you for your conscientious fulfillment of your pledges.

"Your mission, Mr. Phelps, should you decide to accept it . . ." I'm dating myself again, I know, but it's not my fault that God let me see the light of day on earth in 1948, well over half a century ago. The original *Mission: Impossible* TV series came out in the fall of 1966, as I was starting college. It ran until 1973, when I was ordained a deacon, and the reruns kept our imaginations refreshed for some years after that. Those of us in the seminary would eagerly gather around the TV to catch each week's episode, which always began with a taped message describing the impending adventure. The mission was guaranteed to be highly tactical, technological, and fraught with danger. The crew leader, Jim Phelps, listened carefully to the message, which ended with the line above, then a warning and an ominous disclaimer, and finally a wish for good luck from the unseen spy commander. Then, in five seconds, the tape self-destructed and went up in smoke, leaving no trace for the enemy of the week to discover.

Personally, I always found the program tightly written and challenging. For many of us in the seminary, each episode was like a mission statement for the priestly life for which we were preparing. "Should you decide to accept it . . ." How those words turned over and over in my mind in my prayerful discussions with the Lord, the Supreme "Unseen Spy Commander." "I am sending you like lambs in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16, Luke 10:3). Note that those words of Jesus to his disciples appear nearly halfway through both Matthew and Luke. The disciples have had time to hear his message, to walk with him and ask him questions. Afterwards, there will be time to come back and reconnoiter, time to receive further tips and instructions, time to get necessary corrections as they continue to stumble along the way.

As I mentioned, the taped message always ended with a dark and ominous warning: "As always, should you or any member of your IM (Impossible Missions) Force be caught or killed, the secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions." The Apostles were not misled by Jesus, and neither are we. He makes it abundantly clear to them and to us, first of all, what is going to happen to *him*, and also what can very likely happen to *us*. Cf. Matthew chapters 10, 22, 23, & 24; Mark 13; Luke 11 & 21; John 15 & 16; Acts 4, 5, 7, 12, 21, 22, & 28; I Thessalonians 2; I Peter 4; and Revelation 2, 6, & 7. Look 'em up. If those Scripture citations are not enough to show us that we

have been adequately warned by the Lord himself what kind of a reception to expect if we take our baptismal mission seriously, there is something seriously wrong with *us*! But as with *Mission: Impossible* or any other adventurous and worthy cause, it must become our life's passion.

It's daunting, but blessed are those who take up this cause, who throw their whole lives into the message and mission of Christ. We have our mission statement: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Note that the teaching comes first, and THEN the baptizing. How anxious some are to do that the other way around! Parents who have no intention of practicing their faith as they ask to have their children baptized forget that the rite of baptism speaks to *them*: "You will be the *first teachers* of your children in the ways of faith." If you have your children baptized, and then proceed to teach them *by example* that prayer and church have no meaning, don't blame the Church if they seem less than enthused about religious education and the other sacraments. Your actions (or inactions) speak much louder than mere words. When children show up for 1st grade C.C.D. and don't have the foggiest idea of how to make the sign of the Cross or pray the simplest common prayers, it tells us a lot about how seriously you have taken your own and their commitment of baptism. When the going gets tough, you'll have to either get *growing* or get *going*, and that'll be that. We always pray it'll be the former.

Sure, it's disheartening to hear what low percentages of the baptized actually take their Christ-given mission seriously. So here's a challenge, for all of us whose life as Christians is relatively easy, compared to those in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Nigeria, Malaysia, North Korea, China, Viet Nam, and a host of other places around the globe. The news media is embarrassed, after all, to say anything about the widespread persecution of Christians. It's far more *chic* in Hollywood, New York, and much of Washington, D.C., to be seen "courting" Muslims and atheists than it is to say one word about Christians under siege. Christianity is just not *trendy*. The elites are anxious to be thought of as brrooaad-minded, and that of course *ex-cludes* any respect for the Christian faith or those who practice it. Are you ready to take them on? Because they're eager to make fun of you, to ridicule you, to mock you, and to hang all your dirty laundry (of which we have plenty) out to dry. It helps them feel superior.

The challenge? Every morning when you wake up, every time you get into your car and start the engine, every time you arrive at work or school, pause briefly and tell the Lord, "You are sending me into my mission field, Lord. Give me the grace to be alert to every opportunity to announce your gospel and your Kingdom by living / driving, working / studying like the disciple you have called me to be." Then, go *to* it! If West Catholic, or Meijer, or our city streets, were filled with people who each offered a prayer like that many times through the day, people would be battering down our doors trying to get in and see what makes us the way we are. There's no secret tape involved. The message will not self-destruct once we've heard it. Our church doors are open all day. The Scriptures are literally intended to be an open book. The Church has no secret codes or formulas for clandestine degrees of membership. Anyone at all can pick up a catechism and see what it is that we believe and what we *should* be practicing—talk about being edified and horrified at the same time! We are the folks who preach forgiveness, because we've got so much experience with getting it wrong and we know what it means to be forgiven, over and over again.

Mission Sunday – it's *who* we are as God's people, not just one day a year, not just token offerings for faraway places, but a powerful communion with our Savior and with our fellow believers everywhere, for the salvation of the whole world. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: It's a lot easier to build boys than to mend men, to form girls than to re-form women.