

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

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Fr. Bill McGinty

**“Eddie the Rat”**

Everyone who knows me, knows that St Paul is one of my great heroes. For such a rugged little man, he can from, time to time, come out with a purple patch of prose that is truly breath taking. It happens today, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from Romans 12:9.

“Let love be genuine, hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with mutual affection; out do one another in showing honor.”

If you sit down and list the virtues he writes as mandates to his Christians, they read like a complete day’s retreat: “Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit, serve the lord, rejoice in hope, patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.”

Wow! Any one of us who put those mandates into practice would indeed become a ‘tour de force’ as a Christian.

Paul himself was a tour de force. Not only did he set up church after church, and community after community, but he remained in contact with them through his letters for the rest of his life. He energized, inspired, preached, taught, evangelized and made sense of the faith he was so steeped in, to people who were hungry for God, and the spiritual in their life. He left these churches ebullient, vibrant, growing and exuberant. They wailed in grief with a deep sense of loss on the morning he left their town, heading off to his next missionary destination. They had never met Jesus. These churches had not experienced three years of Jesus’ ministry. Yet, despite this, Paul manages in a few short weeks to give his new converts a teaching course on the meaning of Jesus’ life, mission and ministry that is so effective that it transforms their lives, town and community.

How did he do that? He did it because he himself had incorporated Christ into the very fiber of his being. Standing 5’ 2” tall, prematurely bald, thin and weather beaten from his travels, Paul did not look like a messiah or even a prophet. Yet such was his enthusiasm, passion and love of Jesus and the Gospel, it was as if Christ’s story had come to town. With his talent for story telling, his ability as a preacher, his dramatic presentation, Paul unraveled the secrets of the Old Testament and painted the life of Christ from birth to death and Resurrection across the memory screen of their lives. And so indelibly did he do it, that he left them, as much in love with Jesus and his story as he was. Now that is Evangelism.

If Paul was anything he was an evangelist. He was a proclaimer of the Gospel. He was a teller of Christ’s story.

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# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

Today! Now! Here are three ingredients to being an Evangelist. To be an Evangelist you need to have a loving relationship with God; you must have a deep love of your own church and you need to want to share the story of Christ that you love, with those who do not know it but need it.

I once knew a man in our town called “Eddie the Rat” His real name was Edward Michael McIntyre, but everyone called him “Eddie the Rat.” Eddie was only 5’ 3” and always wore a cap. It is said that no one could outsell Eddie. He was the master salesman, because he could talk a mile a minute and then some. Eddie’s mother said Eddie was born talking. People joked that “wee Eddie” could sell sand to the Arabs and refrigerators to the Eskimo’s. It was well known that Eddie once sold \$600.00 of garden furniture to a couple who didn’t have a garden. When the parish priest wanted to renovate, the local church he called on “Eddie the Rat,” to help him. Eddie told him:

“Well, I don’t know Father. Things are pretty tight out there. There is not much money around. Things are tough, but I will try.”

So every night after work, Eddie set out across the town selling church lottery tickets door to door. It was a tough sell, but after twelve months, Fr. Mulligan had his money and completed the repairs to his church. Father thanked Eddie and told him that God would reward him in the next life. As they said good-bye at the door of the church, the priest turned and asked one last question.

“Eddie, I always wanted to ask you, why do they call you Eddie the Rat?”

Eddie stopped, turned and smiled: “Oh that’s easy Father,” he replied. “When I was a kid, everyone thought I looked and sounded like James Cagney. You know, you dirty rat.”

With that he was gone. Six months later Eddie’s mother died and it affected him in a profound way. His enthusiasm for sales and the life of the town left him. He moved away and no one might ever have heard of him again if it had not been for my friend Pete Devlin, who brought me back a story from South Africa ten years later. He had encountered Eddie working as a missionary in a diocese close to the Swaziland border.

“What a character,” he told me. “He can get you anything; bricks, concrete, wood, roofing, you want a church, Eddie can build it. You need a road, Eddie knows a guy who knows a guy. The Sisters need a school. Eddie is the man. Weekends and evenings he teaches kids soccer and basketball and tells them Gospel stories. That little man is on fire with the faith he believes in.”

It sounded like Eddie. Whatever he did, he always did to the max.

“Just one question,” said Pete. “Why does he always introduce himself to the kids by saying: Hello, I’m Eddie the Rat?”

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“No clue” said I, not wanting to break the mystic that Pete held that little man in.

Thinking about it, I suppose Eddie is a lot like St Paul. He is an Evangelist through and through. And like Paul he made the most of the talents that God gave him. He was good at selling things and I suppose that in the Gospel and the Jesus story, he finally found something worth selling.

Jesus in today’s Gospel from Matthew 16 has some bad news to tell his Apostles about his death. For Peter it is a hard sell and he wants none of it. Yet Jesus insists and tells him, “That anyone who loses his life for his sake will find it.” It is the story of Paul’s life. A rich man’s son, a lawyer, a Philosopher, he could have done anything. Yet, he chose to be Christ’s vagabond, always on the road, with nowhere to call home, always with a destination and a story to tell those who most needed to hear it.

Moses in today’s 1<sup>st</sup> reading from Exodus has no such ambitions. He has settled down with his beautiful wife Zipporah, and son Gershom as a shepherd in the land of Midian. He has escaped Egypt and the wrath of Pharaoh. He has survived the desert and now can look forward to the rest of his life in peace. Good food, green pastures, family life, sons, daughters, grandchildren and occasional trips to the Gulf on vacations. He is of one mind, “He is semi retired and nothing, just nothing is going to get in the way to spoil it.” Then along comes God.

Friday night you settle down to a meal, a glass of wine and a good movie and then the telephone rings.

Well, God didn’t have a telephone, so he decided to try to get Moses attention with fire. He wasn’t playing fair. But he is God and he can do that.

Sometimes, in our lives too, God tries to get our attention. It may not be as dramatic as setting the mountainside on fire, but when we look back at the pattern of our lives, we can so often see his handy work and the direction he decided we should take.

Of course, all too often, we attribute our life, our successes and our achievements to ourselves. We fail to see the light on the hillside or the signposts at the most important inter-sections of our lives.

God is speaking to us on a daily basis. He is calling to us to fulfill the next piece of the jigsaw of his plan. He has planted the *where-with-all* to achieve that plan, deep within each one of us, in the talents and abilities he has given us. Whether we lay carpet or sell houses for a living, he has a task for us, “to lay out Christ’s story for others to walk through and to sell that story to those who truly need it.”

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“Eddie the Rat” learned in the course of his life that you are only a great salesman if you have something truly worth selling. Paul the Vagabond knew it too. Share the Gospel and you too are an Evangelist.

So what are today's readings telling us?

1. Watch out for God's light in your life,
2. Be prepared to give up your time and be his Vagabond,
3. It's okay to be a rat. Just as long as you are God's rat.

Use the talents God has given you to tell his son's story.

Amen+