

JULY 9 2025 DEACON MIKE WALSH

I ran across this story about a Sunday school teacher who had eight ten-year-olds. They were very enthusiastic. She asked them at the beginning of their lesson, "Would you give a million dollars to the missionaries?" Each of the children screamed out, "Yes, we will!"

Then she said, "Would you give \$1,000?" Again, they screamed out, "Yes!"

"How about \$100?" "Yes!"

Finally, she said to them, "Would you give a dollar to the missionaries?" All of them yelled out "Yes," except for one boy, Johnny. She could see that Johnny had put his hand over his pocket.

So she looked at him and said, "Johnny, why didn't you yell out yes, that you would give a dollar to the missionaries?" Johnny looked at her and said, "Well, you know, I actually have a dollar."

You see, it's a story about the cost of discipleship and what we are truly willing to spend for Christ. Sometimes it's easy to say "yes" because the demands are abstract. But what happens when we are actually called to act?

I find that our readings over the last little while, and as Father John encouraged us to read our story, our Scriptures, show us this clearly. When you look at Matthew, for example, it starts with the beautiful infancy narrative. By the time we get to Matthew chapter four, we see the disciples being called: "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people," Jesus says to Peter and Andrew.

We've heard that so many times that we might not realize what a tremendous invitation it was, and how difficult it must have been to leave their families and their jobs, which just wasn't done back then.

After they're called, they're formed. In Matthew chapters five to seven, we have the great Sermon on the Mount with teachings like, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Jesus spends time forming their hearts, minds, and characters to be his disciples.

Then we come to today's reading from Matthew chapter ten, and it can be summed up in one word: sent. Jesus tells the Twelve, "Go, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out the demons, and as you're doing so, proclaim that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near."

He knew the disciples were not perfect, but he had chosen them, empowered them, and sent them. The authority they went out with was not their own — it was Christ's. At the centre of being a disciple is always Christ.

There's this pattern: being called, being formed in community, and then being sent out into the world.

St. Augustine of Hippo said, "Wherever you have built up a community, you have built up Christ." Today, we also have the optional memorial for St. Augustine Zhao Rong. Many of us may not have heard of him and his companions, but his story is powerful and parallels St. Paul's story.

Remember, Paul started as Saul, persecuting Christians, and then had his great conversion. St. Augustine Zhao Rong started as a soldier in China, tasked with escorting Christian missionaries to their execution. As he did so, he was deeply touched by their faith, courage, and, most importantly, their peace as they went to their deaths.

His heart changed. He eventually wanted to be baptized, became a priest, and then also died as a martyr. He had 119 companions who suffered the same fate — many were missionaries and local people from China — all disciples.

As St. Augustine said, "Wherever you have built up a community, you have built up Christ."

I got to thinking about a modern-day disciple: Pope Francis. He started life not as Pope, of course, but as Jorge Mario Bergoglio. When he became Pope, my heart leapt — "Wow, this is incredible!" But how did he get there?

He didn't start on that balcony as Pope for the universal Church. When you hear his story, you see the same pattern.

He was born into a household of faith-filled parents and had siblings. He speaks often about how important that faith foundation was. Like him, many of us were blessed with Catholic education and strong communities.

Here at Loretto High School, where we come to you today, it was founded by five courageous Loretto Sisters who said "yes" to Bishop Michael Power in the midst of a pandemic. From that, great schools grew.

I went to Brebeuf College, inspired by St. Jean de Brébeuf and the martyrs. This Catholic education forms us deeply. In the U.S., I am always impressed by how parish schools are so central to local communities.

Pope Francis is a product of this kind of community and formation. He was then sent as a missionary, going to serve in different places, not only

helping people but also being deeply impacted by them. "Wherever you have built up a community, you have built up Christ."

Then I thought about the many hidden builders of our Church — the hidden disciples. I look at you, the members of the Daily TV Mass community. You may not think of yourselves as missionaries or as people who might one day form a future Pope, but in truth, you are.

We recently celebrated our week of Masses for prayers for vocations. Over 3,500 of you, and many more on Facebook, offered your prayers for those seeking their vocation. We heard a story from Erin about her call to be a consecrated virgin. After that, we received a beautiful email from Africa from a woman who said, "I never heard of that — could I please connect with Erin to learn more?"

You and your prayers make a difference. The missionaries who touched St. Augustine Zhao Rong's heart likely never saw the fruit of their sacrifice. The people who inspired Pope Francis may never have imagined where his path would lead.

All of you who supported our week of Masses for vocations — you have no idea what your prayers will mean. But God sees it all.

We are called by name to go in peace, glorifying the Lord by our lives, helping to form faithful disciples through our prayers — disciples who will then go out into the world, proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven is near.

God bless.