

Alive & Well

Inspired by John 16:15-20

Class was dismissed with this assignment: Go into the whole community and document everyone you encounter who is proclaiming the Gospel. Listen for a good approach to proclaiming the Good News in such a way that others come to believe and want to be saved through Baptism. Whoever brings in a believable story will be rewarded, whoever shares a story we don't believe will not receive a passing grade.

The students set out looking for signs. Emory headed straight to the Church — surely that is the place where she will most likely see the Holy Spirit at work bringing souls to the Lord. Emory arrived about 30 minutes before Mass would begin. She ascended the steps and opened the tall, sturdy, wooden doors keeping the beautiful house of the Lord a safe and sacred space. Before her eyes could adjust from the sunlight to the interior light, her nose took in the familiar scent of incense and candles. Yes, this is where people come to believe! Emory dipped her hand into the cool, clear Holy Water and blessed herself recalling her own Baptism.

She stepped across the marble floor and heard the angelic voices of the choir warming up for the service. A young lady was escorting her aging grandmother up the center aisle. She overheard the elderly woman thank her granddaughter for driving her and coming early so she could pray the Rosary. "I just love hearing the beautiful music while I pray," she said. The young lady rolled her eyes and said, "I wish they would play new songs. Those are as old as you, Granny! We need something fresh!" The two slowly made their way to Granny's favorite pew — 2nd from the front, on the right. They knelt to pray.

Emory genuflected, then began walking the perimeter to meditate on the Stations of the Cross. As she prayed before the 10th Station, a Sacristan zoomed by in a flurry of worry because the Eucharistic Ministers were late. A visitor stopped him asking if they could get information on joining the church and enrolling in RCIA. "I'm sorry," he blurted out. "I just don't have time right now." And just like that, he was off again. The poor person felt totally dismissed and defeated, so they just turned around and walked out the door.

Emory was stunned! She started observing the people who had assembled for Mass. One teenager was scrolling through messages and pictures on their phone. A young mother was fussing at her squirmy child. A man in a suit huffed out of his seat after a guy covered in tattoos sat next to him. A young couple sat huddled in a back corner giggling and taking selfies, seemingly unaware they were even in Church!

Emory realized this was not the best place for her extra credit assignment after all. Later that afternoon, she decided to visit the local soup kitchen and volunteer for the afternoon shift. She parked in the downtown parking garage and quickly descended the three flights of stairs. She took a short cut through City Park and noticed a crowd gathering by the big yellow bench in the center of the park. Perched on the bench was a young man in suit and tie waving a black Bible in the air. "In the name of Jesus, I command Satan to leave this city! Hate has taken hold of our hearts. We must speak a new language of love to each other. Pray with me, brothers and sisters, that we may see our likenesses, not only our differences. Who is with me?"

Some cheered. Others crossed themselves. A few scoffed and continued on their way. Emory was intrigued. Is this a sign of a true believer? Then the young preacher reached into a box and picked up a serpent with his hands, and said who will dare to drink the venom from this snake? If you believe, it will not harm you. Come forward, if you are sick and I will lay my hands on you and you will recover."

Well, that was enough for everyone! They quickly cleared out of the area, including Emory! She exited the park and crossed the street passing a local grocery store. She spotted a young mother of three struggling to unload her shopping cart while juggling a baby in her arms and a screaming toddler in the cart. Her oldest son, who looked to be only 5 or 6 was trying to help. But, he couldn't quite reach into the cart, and he couldn't console his crying sister. Bethany had no choice, but to bring them all when she went shopping. They were out of milk and bread and most of the staples. The two littles ones had been sick all week, and today was her first opportunity to replenish. Her husband abandoned them right after the baby was born, and she had no family in the area to help.

People from her church had promised to pray for them. Bethany believed their intentions were good, but no one actually made any tangible offers to help. Before leaving the house that morning, she asked the Lord to bless her and her family, and all who were praying for them. She prayed for strength to get through this day.

At this moment, an impatient shopper blew his horn and yelled out his window for her to hurry up. He wanted her parking space, and he needed to get inside. He was in an awful hurry and became enraged at Bethany. Emory was getting closer to the action when she saw an extraordinary thing. An older woman approached and gently put her hand on Bethany's shoulder. She spoke softly to the young frazzled mother who was in tears by this time. Bethany listened and you could see the tension leaving. She even managed a little smile. The woman told her, "I've raised three myself. Days like this are very very hard. But, you will remember more good than bad. People like that — she smiled and waved at the irate gentleman who honked again and shook his fist in reply — they sometimes can't see anything but themselves. Don't let them worry you, honey."

Then, she helped her finish unloading the bags and babies. Bethany thanked her for her kindness and help. The woman walked over to the gentleman's care and said, "She just needed a little help, that's all. You'll get your parking spot shortly. Have a good day." and she left. This bought Bethany a little time to buckle everyone in, start the car, and close her eyes for a moment. "Thank You, Lord Jesus." she whispered. "Thank You for being here with us." Her mind's eye could see Him being taken from the parking lot into Heaven where He took His seat at the right hand of God.

Bethany went forth and showered her children with love, joy, and gratitude; not hurt, anger, and bitterness. Emory presented her report on the Lord working in that encounter in that very ordinary place. She knew this confirmed the Word through the simplest, quite unexpected accompanying signs. Emory was awarded an A+ !!!

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