**Growing the Pie Week 5**

**Vision Reads the Signs of the Times**

**Message Notes**

### Just like people, churches can lose their way when don’t have vision for the future. Our vision is to be “a community growing in faith where everyone loves to belong.”

### To realize that vision, we must have:

* Leaders at all levels who are courageous and have the desire to serve;
* A strong faith that will guide us through dark and confusing times;
* Passion, drive, and energy for building the Kingdom of God; and
* People who are active, engaged, and involved.

### But, there is one more essential ingredient: The ability to read the signs of the times.

### Jesus warned his disciples that the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem would soon be destroyed and taught them how to read the signs of the times to know when they should flee.

### The Jewish religious authorities, however, failed to read the signs and therefore were taken by surprise when the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

### Every age has the responsibility of scrutinizing the signs of the times in the light of the gospel in order to prepare the Church to respond to new developments in the world.

### Pope Francis is encouraging the Church today to read the signs of the times by listening to what ordinary Catholics have to say about faith and our world.

### When we look at the world today, we see a rapid rise of secular culture, a precipitous decline in church membership, and growing ranks of people disconnected from faith.

### To become a church where “everyone loves to belong,” we must reach out to everyone, especially the unchurched. We have to love them, want them in our pews, and actively look for them. Otherwise, they will remain lost to us.

### We need to show those unaffiliated with any faith tradition that religion can be different from what they expected, that church can be alive, engaging, and welcoming, and that the Mass can be a source of personal growth and deeply fulfilling.

### We don’t know when Jesus will return, but we can look for the signs and make sure we are ready to meet him. That means we need to show up, not alone, but with all the lost.

**Praying Always**

*By Lisa Rosenlund*

One of my favorite cookbooks is *From a Monastery Kitchen* by Brother Victor-Antoine d’Avila-Latourrette, a modern-day version of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. Brother Victor’s cookbooks contain inspirational quotes from Brother Lawrence and others, which I ponder while making things like “Saint Scholastica Soup.”  Unwittingly, I have been praying in the tradition of Brother Lawrence!

Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman around 1614 and was raised by working-class parents in modern-day eastern France. He developed what we would now call post-traumatic stress syndrome after enlisting as a soldier in the brutal Thirty Year’s War between Catholics and Protestants in Germany. He also sustained a serious physical injury which left him with a limp and caused him to be discharged from his regiment.

While we have no way of knowing whether Nicholas actively participated in the killing, looting and pillaging, or just witnessed it, we do know that he became obsessed with a quest for redemption. After failed careers as a hermit and a footman, at age twenty-six Nicholas followed in his uncle’s footsteps and became a Discalced Carmelite brother in Paris. He took the religious name of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection and remained there fifty years working mostly as a cook.

Brother Lawrence’s first ten years in the monastery were difficult.  He continued to feel that he had no hope of salvation and prayed frequently in a private nook near his pantry. There he kept a small picture of Jesus, which reminded him that he was not the only one who suffered. Gradually, Brother Lawrence discovered that he did not need to go to the nook, but was able to pray at all times, even if it was simply repeating the Lord’s Prayer while he worked.

Using his “methodless method,” Brother Lawrence carried on a running exchange with God as he peeled potatoes, seasoned soup, scrubbed kettles, etc. He made his tasks an integral part of his prayer life and is quoted as saying, “. . . in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great a tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.”

Brother Lawrence’s kitchen became a chapel of sorts where cart drivers, grocers, or fishmongers could hear practical advice on how God cared for them. A priest friend was able to capture Brother Lawrence’s clear, no-nonsense way of speaking in notes he took of their conversations. These notes were published as a small book called, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, which is still so popular that there are numerous different versions on Amazon!

In the midst of chaos, commotion, and clutter, Brother Lawrence found a way to pray always. As we read the signs of the times in our modern, secular society, it makes sense, now more than ever, to “remain in the gaze of God” during our hectic days.