

The summer after my ordination, 1988, found me in a classroom at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock enrolled in a course entitled: Educational Exceptions. It was a class on common learning disabilities – and to pass the course we needed to write a 15-20 page paper on some disability that impeded learning in the classroom.

Having recently read a short article on one such disability -- I decided to write my paper on it and more than once was discouraged by the professor -- because she did not think there would be enough current information on the topic.

The disability then was simply called ADD—Attention Deficit Disorder ---- and neither I nor the professor knew that within a couple of years – it would be all the rage in educational journals. It was the only time in my life I considered myself to be on the cutting edge of education! By the way, even though it was not an accepted disability by the American Psychiatric Association until 1994 -- there was plenty of information on the subject in 1988 --- and I did pass the class.

Attention Deficit Disorder: a diagnose given to one who has an extremely short attention span - -- a label given to a person who has great difficulty getting or staying focused on a task or activity. A disability, now in hindsight, I would say 90% of my students in the classroom had ---- and I have found over the years, even quite a few parishioners in the pews have -- especially during a homily – so I am observing all of you today. . .

If I was ahead of my time in 1988 – then Jesus was certainly ahead of his time in 1st century Palestine --- Jesus knew people could have an extremely short attention span – Jesus knew people could have difficulty getting or staying focused on a task or activity ---- even when it came to something as spectacular as the kingdom of God --- especially if one has to wait for it to come about.

Because that’s the situation Jesus is describing in the Gospel today – that in between time of his death and resurrection – and his coming again ----- which those in the early church thought would be within their lifetimes ----- and here we are 2,000 years later still waiting for its occurrence.

And so much like the Israelites in the Old Testament who time and again strayed from their fidelity to the covenant --- Christians throughout these two millennia have often times strayed from the pursuit of the values of God’s kingdom, and have settled for the values offered by this world --- complete with bigger barns to store all our stuff. . . All because we suffer from spiritual ADD.

So what is the solution to staying focused in our spiritual lives? Oh, you’ve heard it all before – regular prayer, spiritual reading, frequent participation in the Eucharist, hanging out with like-minded people who share our values --- all for the sake of nurturing and growing our faith: the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.

Without returning again and again to those things that strengthen our faith – our spiritual ADD is likely to kick in – and we will be chasing after every new shiny thing that society throws at us that is supposedly good for us – or absolutely necessary for our survival as a human consumer. . .

So just as we have to become disciplined in exercise and eating right if we want a body that is in shape -- - so, too, we have to become disciplined in our spiritual pursuits.

Also, I think, we need a good dose of something mentioned in today’s first reading – again, something our ancestors in faith had – and that is courage. Courage to make the choices we know are right – even if no one else around us is making them. Courage to choose God’s will rather than our own. Courage to engage our time, talent, and treasure in building God’s kingdom and not our own.

Courage is what got Peter out of the boat and walking on water toward Jesus.

Courage is what got Paul out on the road to proclaim the Good News of salvation to the Gentiles – in spite of push-back from others in the early church.

Courage is what got Mary to speak her yes to God in spite of living in a time and place when unmarried pregnant women could be stoned to death.

And courage is what can get us to shape up and buck up – and be those people God is calling us to be. And courage comes from a deep and abiding faith.

There is a story related to the Old Testament concerning the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.

Picture it – the Israelite nation led by Moses, fleeing from slavery and bondage. Their Exodus is stopped on the shores of the Red Sea and the people are glancing back over their shoulders. God has promised them liberation and freedom. They know that and they believe that – but now are standing on the shore of the sea and Pharaoh’s army is in hot pursuit.

Moses raises his arms and prays for God to lead his people to safety. He gestures with his staff over the water ----- but nothing happens.

Indeed, nothing happens until the first foot of the first person actually steps into the water and shows, through that simple act of faith, that they do, in fact, have faith in God’s promise of salvation.

When that first step of courage is taken – only then does the sea part, and the people cross over into freedom and liberation.

So today, let’s all take that first courageous step in faith ----- and suddenly a way will open up before us that we did not see before. Problems will be overcome --- our spiritual ADD will be no more ---- and we will be able to focus on doing the will of God.