

And the sign said...

The reporter for the local television station called, wondering about the electronic sign outside our church. She was not the only one who called inquiring about the sign. Some even stopped by to make some comments. Several persons stopped their vehicles and took pictures of the sign and its messages. Even vehicles with out of town license plates stopped to take pictures.

The local TV station found the message noteworthy and even amusing, especially that the message was created by a mysterious parishioner who indicated that the message reflected the feelings of the community. Obviously, the sign continued to generate some press. The reporter indicated that, usually, church signs reflect some biblical passage. Why was this one so different and amusing?

The comments on the sign were as different and varied as the people who made them. Someone objected to the sign, indicating that it was violating the principle of church and state. Another suggested that the sign put the community in a bad light. Another complained because the sign didn't contain the times of weekend Masses. Others suggested that the sign reflected the mood, concerns and attitude of the community. Most enjoyed a hearty laugh at the message on the sign.

One Saturday morning at 6:00 a.m., I changed the sign. A few moments later, the doorbell rang. A young woman, who was out jogging, stood outside. "You just changed the sign?" she queried. I said that I did. "Could you change it back to the message you had. I was jogging past and I didn't catch the whole message." "Where do you get all this unusual messages?" she continued. In a non-committal way, I said, "in various places." I changed the message for her and she continued on.

The whole reaction and experience was both exciting and surprising. It made me wonder about our approach to sharing the good news today through a variety of means and sources. I presume that, if Jesus was around today, he would have a Face Book page, a Twitter account, an iPad as well as an iPhone and use them to communicate his message with his audience. Even the present Pope suggested that we use all the modern means of communications to communicate the gospel.

Sometimes, we like to put people and religion in boxes. We decide how they should fit in the box; what they should wear; how they should act; what they should say and what areas are off limits. We decorate and size the box to our own dimensions and satisfaction. Once we have done all that, then we can relate to them from our own comfort or insecurity zones.

Jesus defied all the conventional wisdom of the time. He was born at a time and place that surprised people. As a twelve year old, he matched wits with the so called learned and wise in the temple and shocked them with his intelligence and wisdom.

People wanted him to be a cookie cutter prophet but he decided to create his own refreshing mold. Some people mapped out his life for him, trying to choreograph all his moves and agendas. He belittled their efforts and created his own mold and agenda. They wanted him to be a rebel and political king and he became a different kind of rebel who danced to a script that had not been written before. He surprised everyone by the simplicity of his message; by his down to earth parables and wisdom and especially by the surprise ending, or is that beginning, to his life.

Isn't it wonderful to meet someone who is a breath of fresh air; someone who challenges the conventional with their spontaneity and unorthodox approach to life; someone who keeps us guessing and refreshed by their attitude and outlook; someone who realizes they themselves are mystery and continues to reflect that mystery to everyone they meet. Such a person never tires of surprising, of challenging, of expanding horizons of debunking all political and religious correctness.

That mysterious parishioner called me and said that they had another new and refreshing idea for our church sign. I can't wait to see it; to see if people will stop, take pictures, comment on it, laugh with it or find it puzzling. Then, we will all know what the sign said.