



PENIEL

February 2002
Lent

WHERE JACOB WRESTLED WITH GOD AND SURVIVED

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*"If you wish to be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your cross each day, and follow me.
For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it, and if you choose to lose your life you will find it."*

Luke 9:23-25

The paradox of the call of Christ is to find our life, we first have to give it up. Lent is a summons to look at our lives, to see if we are really living, and then to go further, to determine what in our lives we are willing to give up in order to find life. This past summer when I "took time off", the reality is that I was running away. Running away from my own road to Calvary, to real life.

Nearly eight years ago I came to Polk Street with a romantic idea of living voluntary poverty and being a presence to those that society seems to overlook. Within the year reality began to sink in. I had chosen to live with a population that is a target for the many stereotypes given to drug abusers, prostitutes, drug dealers, gays/lesbians/bisexuals/transgenders, homeless, and people of the punk culture. I too became the target for those stereotypes, with the added ones of a male priest working with youth. I became the keeper of secrets and had the knowledge of the shadow sides of many people from many socio-economic backgrounds, thus becoming feared and hated.

I proclaimed these truths:

- † Each individual is the Christ. We are called to move beyond age, gender, socio-economic background, race or ethnic background to be a presence in their journey. We are one with them on the journey as fellow Christ bearers and all of us receive the same grace of God.
- † For the Church to be the body of Christ she must be in the midst of the poorest of the poor getting her hands dirty, being one with those who suffer.
- † Issues around sexuality, drug abuse, poverty, homelessness, and all of the other many issues that effect the quality of life of people are to be looked at through the Gospel love of Jesus, particularly as expressed in the Great Commandment.

Altogether these would make me a target of gossip, character assassination, physical and verbal abuse, and ultimately a target of physical death threats.

And so I chose to run last summer after nearly seven years. But, throughout that terrible summer and the months that have followed, one certainty has remained that I could not escape – it is to *this* task that I

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am called, and to choose otherwise would be to choose a lingering, living death. So I chose to return, to take up the cross.

This for me is a continuing process. A process in which for most of the time I am a coward. But so it is for all of us when we look into the eyes of Jesus of Nazareth and hear the words: "If you wish to be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your cross each day, and follow me..."



held in collaboration with St. Ignatius Prep School Social Justice Club.

Good Friday Stations of the Cross

We will gather at City Hall on **March 29th** at 12 Noon. We will march through Tenderloin remembering Christ crucified in our City today. If you are interested in volunteering please call Fr. River.



Directions To Ministry



With increased police presence, more hard core policies of the City towards homelessness it has become obvious that our direction of ministry is changing. Due to the changing locations of our population as they respond to the above situations we find ourselves having to move with them. We will become more mobile in that three times a week we will do outreach in other parts of town where the population of young drug abusers tend to congregate: the Mission, Castro, Church Street areas, and under the bridges of the freeways. In the weeks ahead we will be emphasizing a more visible presence of public liturgy in more strategic areas. We will celebrate the Eucharist in other public areas, and organize and collaborate on events such as the February 23rd and Good Friday liturgy as described following. . .

We Are Beggars

Our heartfelt thanks to Stephanie Salter whose article in the Chronicle helped us enter the year in the black. We offer thanks to all of you for your most generous gifts the past couple of months. We depend solely upon your generosity. This generosity during December and January have provided for:

- 1350 meals to be served to 752 people
- 600 pair of socks,
- 350 blankets,
- & numerous articles of clothing,
- 232 Christmas gifts,
- 35 hospital calls,
- 15 jail visits,
- & harm reduction ministry to 345 people.



Those of you who have given through your prayers, gifts, and thoughts have been the presence of Christ in the midst of the Polk Street kids. We need \$4,555.21 a month to meet our budget; present on hand we have \$6,053.15. We ask that you remember us in your prayers and gifts.

Drug-Related Deaths Remembered in Liturgy



Our friend Jake Butler, age 22, died in January from a drug over-dose. His is the latest name on a too long list of lives cut short. The City Hall steps will be the site for a *Memorial Liturgy offered for All Those Who Died of Drug Related Causes in 2001*. Meet on the Polk Street side of **City Hall** at **10:00 am** on **February 23rd**.

You may also choose to show your solidarity with the homeless through a *Sleep Over in Civic Center Park*, Friday night, **February 22nd**. This event is

E-Mail Newsletter

Once again if you would like to receive your newsletter by email please let Fr. River know at punkpriest@cs.com A hard copy will be mailed every two months, but each month there will be an email newsletter.

