



WE NEED HEROES

Archbishop Jerome Listecki

Brothers, this is a great privilege for me to address you by sharing my thoughts on the spiritual life. I'm so proud of the Men of Christ. They've done so much for our diocese and to develop the spiritual sense and direction in their own personal lives. The title of the talk is we need Heroes. This is true in every aspect of our lives, but especially true, when it comes to our spiritual lives. We are called to live lives of Holiness. This is our shared common vocation. This may sound radical and certainly rejected by those in our secular society, but we will never be completely happy unless we are fulfilled in our destiny to God, Matthew Kelly States, in his book *Resisting Happiness*. You can never become the best version of yourself, unless you get up every morning ready to slay resistance that stands between you and the person God created you to be. You are here today, listening and participating. This is a significant moment towards embracing God and establishing the best version of yourself.

In the early years of my priesthood I lived and studied in Rome for four years. Now, we have a number of beautiful churches here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. But I tell you we pale in comparison to the beauty of hundreds of churches in Rome. It is the home of the four great Basilica's; St. Peter's, St. Paul Outside the Walls, Mary Major, and John Lateran. I was amazed every time I entered one of these great churches. St. Peter, stands alone, as the most recognizable Church. It's the church with the bones of St. Peter, the first pope entombed inside. Just to give you a sense of the size of Saint Peter, if you were to hit the longest ball recorded in Major League Baseball from the back of the Basilica wall, where the altar of the chair of Saint Peter sits. It would barely make it to the front entrance of the Basilica.

St. Paul has a monastic feel and is the place that Paul was beheaded. Mary Major is a jewel box ornately decorated, and properly dedicated to the Blessed Mother. But the church that always captured my imagination was St. John Lateran. When one walks the main aisles of Saint John, one is dwarfed by the gigantic statue figures of the Apostles that filled the niches. These statues are some 15 feet high. Each one of these Apostles was called by Christ to follow him. But upon reflection, there was nothing special about any of them. There are fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot. They were, in fact, ordinary; the most influential of them all was Paul who was called out of time, which means after Christ's resurrection. And once called, he rejected his authority, power, influence, and treasure to follow this Lord, Jesus, who led him into sufferings, stoning, shipwrecks, flogging, imprisonment, and eventually beheading.

When I'm confirming a young man, who takes the confirmation named Paul, after reciting everything that Paul went through, after what he gave up and then what he was subjected to because of his relationship to Jesus. I look at him and sing, what a friend I have in Jesus. For Paul as well as for the other Apostles, there was no doubt about the one person who united them all and that was the person of Jesus Christ. They could not live without him, no matter what they called to give up in all probability. Not one of you who is hearing this presentation today could tell me who was the richest man of that time or the most intelligent or the most popular. However, we all know Peter, James, John, Andrew, James, Phillip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Matthew, Simon, and Paul. We venerate them. We know and celebrate the apostles. These ordinary men. Why two thousand years later, do we remember them when so many other great figures are forgotten? Simply because they followed Jesus.

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They proclaimed him in life and followed him into death, all suffered martyrdom, with the exception of St. John who tradition tells us died of old age, but there were attempts to martyr him, twice through poison and by being boiled alive.

The apostles realize that their lives could never be fulfilled without Jesus. Without him. Therefore their happiness could never have been achieved without Jesus and their death was the passageway to the eternal life promise to all who believe

I'm beginning with this image so that we understand that success in life comes from our commitment to Christ. And through him, we become larger than life itself. Beyond this world's understanding. Before we examine heroes, realize that Jesus goes beyond the definition of hero. We admire heroes, but we are called to become other Christ's.

Now, rituals convey a reality in the symbols that it administers.

I'll tell you a wonderful little story. I was called by friends to baptize their new little son who was born. And I went to the church and they had one of these large baptismal pools.

They asked if I could use the pool itself for the baptism and I said, certainly. They disrobed the little child and I held a child up before the congregation as I began to lower the child towards the pool and the water, his little four-year-old sister yelled out loud enough for everybody to hear. Don't do it father. He can't swim, he can't swim. Everybody of course laughed. And they thought it was kind of the sense of the sister worrying about the brother. However, she caught what the ritual was conveying. In baptism, we all went into that water and then emerged a new in Christ. We die to ourselves. So, that Christ could become one in us.

It is a challenge before us to seek to be Christ for our families, our parishes, and our communities. I can think of no greater compliment being paid to someone when someone would reach out to you and say, you know, you're like Christ to me. You're another Christ. We will rely upon the assistance of others that we admire to inspire us that through the inspiration of heroes, the Light of Christ that dwells in us will shine forth for everyone to see. We are called to be Christ and heroes Inspire us to shine forth His Image in the way we give testimony

through our actions and our character. So please indulge me now as I put forth three Heroes that have inspired me. And they are Minnie, George, and JP2.

I've always wanted to be a priest. I can never think of a time in my life that I didn't view that as my vocation. So you would naturally think that for my First Holy Communion that I would ask for a cross, Bible, or a prayer book, but my request was for an autograph baseball of my favorite White Sox player, Minnie Orestes Miñoso. My uncle, who was a police officer, had a friend, who worked the dugout at Comiskey Park and I received my desired gift. Throughout my life, Minnie remained a favorite. He was an excellent player, and the stats indicated it. However, what made Minnie so exceptional is there was never a doubt that Minnie loved the game with a passion. He loved everything about it. The fans, the players, the game itself. He was forever youthful. Even in his old age. The only player to play in seven decades of the sport. When the White Sox had their 2005 Championship season, Minnie, a legend was in the grandstands with the fans not in the celebrities box. He wanted to be with the people who love the game with the same passion that he did. My sister was a teacher and Minnie Minoso had the occasion to visit her school. He was lost and my sister approached him to ask, if he needed help, she looked at him and said, with surprise, you're Minnie Minoso. And with all humility, he said, you know, me? Minnie died in 2015. He was not admitted to the Baseball Hall of Fame until this year. For Minnie this was not the goal. The goal was to be a promoter and supporter of the game, the game that he loved. I hope that my love for Christ and his church always possesses the youthful, enthusiasm and dedication that my hero Minnie possessed. And then I share that spirit with the faithful entrusted to my care. I love Christ and his church.

If you ever visit me at my residence, you will probably know that in my living room. There are several pictures of George Washington. In my estimation he's the greatest president in our history. For me, the case is simple. First, there was no president before him. He established the office and the newly formed Republic. Second, without his personal stature The Constitutional Convention would never have created the Constitution of the United States. And third, he was offered the crown

and instead refused it for the sake of the democratic nation and participatory republic.

There are those that might hold forth President Lincoln as the greatest president, because he saved the union, certainly, a tremendous task. But without Washington, there would have been no Union to save. Some think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the greatest but without Washington, no Constitution would exist for President Roosevelt to exercise his presidential executive powers.

Former Supreme Court, Justice Antonin, Scalia refers to Washington as the indispensable man. Alloy was a general. He was not an exceptional military strategist. He wasn't nearly the brightest of the founders and often embarrassed by his lack of formal education. But Scalia comes to the conclusion that it must have been character. Washington was a man of honor, of constancy, of steady determination, a man who could be believed, trusted, counted on. A man who would step down as president after two terms though he could have been elected for life because that's what he believed, a Democratic Republic required. I'm inspired by the character of the man, George Washington. I would pray that my character projects, someone who is committed to Jesus in the church and can be relied upon and trusted. That my actions are always directed for the good of Christ and his church.

I'm a proud John Paul, the Second Bishop. Ironically, I met John Paul, the Second on Washington's birthday, February 22nd 1980 at the North American college, in Rome. Besides being the pope, you knew you were in the presence of someone exceptional. We were all lined up to be introduced. He brought an excitement to the papacy that had been lacking for generations. He was 58 years old or a relatively young man, a young Pope. He swam, he skied, he climbed mountains. In many ways, he was like us a parish priest, a teacher in the Seminary. He led the faithful through the occupations of the Nazis and the Communists and the church only grew stronger. Now, I would meet this gigantic historic figure. Having been raised in a Polish American Parish in Chicago. I remember the Polish greeting that we were instructed as Altar Boys by the sisters to say before we were serving Mass. So I looked at the pope and I said to him, praise me the name of Jesus Christ, and he responded to me, I'm in now

and forever, amen. And he said, in polish. Do you understand polish? And I looked at him and said, no, I speak Italian. He says, Oh Mamma Mia. Then he pulled me close and he used the Polish term for my last name. Listecky. When are you going to go visit Poland? And I said, well, your Holiness in English. I said, I hope to go this summer because it's being arranged and he smiled with that little glinted elfishness that he has in his eyes and he said, "Good, you know. I have a few friends there." Few friends? Millions upon millions, not only there, but all throughout the world.

I was privileged to watch the great leadership that John Paul the second, provided for the 26 years of his papacy. His accomplishments are volumes. The code of canon law, the catechism of the Catholic church, an extension of Catholic social teaching in every areas and his pro-life and family positions will not be surpassed for generations to come. It was exciting to be a Catholic and marvel at this man shepherding the World Church as he traveled throughout the world. I remember his attempted assassination at Saint Peter's Square. He would later meet with the imprisoned assassin and offer him forgiveness. He was definitely admired by the world and gave a clear definition to the church. You knew who you were and you knew your identity in Christ. Even in later years when suffering from the Stages of Parkinson's disease. He struggled to be present to the faithful. Once barely able to speak, his face impassioned that cloth and cloud of parkinsonism. He received the faithful who still flocked in the tens of thousands to see him. At the end of the audience, those who are physically challenged were brought before the pope. One, young man, who was suffering from spastic contraction, could hardly be contained in his wheelchair. He was moving and flinging his arms back and forth. Coming before John Paul, the pope tried to reach out to the young man, but he failed his own Parkinson's prevented him from doing that. The young man then while flailing with his arms, reached out his hand, clenched his fist and yelled, courage. Holy Father, courage. The gift of courage that was shared in the leadership of the Pope was now being returned to him by the very suffering individuals he desired to serve. We serve one another. In courage we stand for Christ. He gave the world Divine Mercy Sunday and God would take him to his reward on that very celebration. I can tell you that a number

of Priestly ordinations were inspired by John Paul, the Second. The inspiration to church leaders, the political difference he made and the figure for religious freedom that he represented. At this time, with the struggles for freedom in the Ukraine. We need the courage of St. John Paul. He is my hero. I am inspired by his courage through suffering. His steadfast faithfulness to church teaching, his love for Jesus, and his embrace of Mary, the Mother of God. I only hope that I might reflect in my role as priest and Bishop, his courage and leadership in the face of critics leading people to the truth of Christ's love through the teachings of the church.

We're faced with challenges. We need to be inspired by our heroes and we need to be heroes for others. Religious freedom can no longer be taken for granted. Secularism is the new state religion and Catholicism stands in opposition to the anti-life, anti-family, and anti gender ideological policies. It's clear to me. We're not just viewed as an opposing voice, but now the enemy. It should be no wonder that the voice of traditional religion is no longer included in the country's future Vision. How do we counter this movement? We must give testimony and witness to the truth of Jesus and his church. Why? Because we're Believers. We know that the fullness of life cannot be achieved apart from God, and that God must be the priority of our lives. The way to Salvation is through Jesus and we are called to be other Christ for our brothers and sisters.

But Heroes Inspire us and exemplify characteristics that we need to incorporate into our lives to inspire others. There will be various Heroes that we have. And each of them having a particular talent or attribute that we can take upon ourselves and we can send out the message of Christ through them. So, I'm going to give you a few things that I would hope that you would always be attentive to. As a coach, I would always kind of take a look and say, hey, if we're going to be doing this, remember the fundamentals. When you go away from the fundamentals, you go away from that which helps you to achieve and excel. The same thing in terms of our spiritual life. We need to make sure we are attentive to the fundamentals and I want you to be attentive to these fundamentals.

So first, attend Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation. Go to confession regularly. We acknowledge that Jesus is there for us and with his forgiveness and he will offer his life as food for the journey.

Second, pray daily. It doesn't have to be hours. It could be just five, ten, fifteen minutes, but do it at the same time, everyday and emphasize a prayer of thanksgiving. Realizing God is there for us and with us to strengthen us with his blessings.

Three, target some good work for the sake of those in need. And I'm going to tell you, do it intentionally in the name of Jesus, that intentionality is extremely important because we realize what we are doing and for whom we are doing it.

Number four, join with others, who share your commitment to Jesus. Surround yourself with individuals who also have that same sense is so important to be fed and to be strengthened. So you can do that together by reading the scriptures and maybe just discussing them or discussing some Catholic authors that are well grounded, well-founded.

And number five. When given the opportunity, establish your spiritual leadership. Lead your family in prayer at a meal. Lead them with the rosary or take the opportunity to at a family gathering to pray to God in thanksgiving for those relationships that you have.

My brothers, you are called to be other Christs. Use your Heroes to inspire characteristics in you that will allow your faith to shine as a light for our communities, parishes and families. We need your faithfulness. We need you to help share God's love always. I pray that we strive for Holiness so that we might be happy with God forever. God bless you and your families, Men of Christ.