

“Living the Mystery”

by Fr. Augie Gothman

I heard it in the Sacristy!

One of my tasks is to go to visit many of our parishes, either with Bishop Hoepfner, as part of my vocations work, or as a weekend substitute for my brother priests. The conversations in the sacristy before Mass begins are often funny, poignant, and sometimes puzzling. From time to time, I will use the comments I hear real people say as a jumping off point for my column.

Once I was substituting for a pastor. It was about 90 seconds before the Mass was scheduled to begin, when an usher poked his head in the sacristy door and said: “The reader didn’t show up, do you want me to grab someone out of the crowd?” One of the musicians said, “Aren’t you a lector? Why don’t you do it?” The usher said, “I did read the readings before Mass, but it’s not my weekend.” To which I said, “If you just pick someone from the people, they won’t be prepared to read; you’ve at least read the readings at home.” And the usher said this: “Oh, it won’t matter, nobody pays any attention to the readings anyway.”

A few months ago I was speaking to a young woman I consider to be faith-filled and who puts her faith into practice. She confided in me that she often tries hard to listen the readings, but gets distracted by the readers themselves. She said, “They look so bored sometimes.”

I think that one of the most important things we do is to listen and hear the Word of God proclaimed. God’s Word has the power to change hearts, bring conversion, healing, repentance, and joy; if only we can let loose the awesome power.

Sometimes we proclaimers get too familiar, and forget the reverence and awesome splendor of God’s Word. We can become flip in our attitudes; thinking that no one is listening anyway, so that our inattention to the Word is mirrored by those who hear us. I challenge myself, and all entrusted with the ministry of proclamation, to be more careful proclaimers of God’s Word—because people like this young woman are listening and watching.