

For those of you who don't know me I am the new deacon for the parish. I am a local person. I grew up in Fort Fairfield on a potato farm, I graduated High School there, I was educated at the University of Maine and by the diocese through Loyola Institute for Ministry. I now live in Caribou with my wife Janis. You know the most common question I get from people in the parish since I started this process is...why did you decide to do this??you must have always wanted to be a deacon.

Honestly, as young man, this never occurred to me, until about 15 years ago I didn't know what a deacon was. But this idea, this vocation, did occur to the Holy Spirit, I am a prayerful person, I have a good relationship with the Spirit and I listen. so that's what I trying to do.... follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, and be confident I will continue in my conversion to Christ and do what he asks me, and be the best disciple of Jesus I can be, and serve this parish well as a deacon.

In my everyday life I am a social worker, I've been working for Aroostook Mental Health for 25 years. I've had a few different jobs with them, but right now I work full time as a drug and alcohol counselor at a place call the Farm in Limestone. We treat people struggling with alcoholism and opiate addiction; two things that have affected almost every family in this church.

As a deacon one of my primary responsibilities is to preach the gospel, and you are the lucky ones that get to hear my first sermon. We are all called to live the gospel, in out words and in our actions, the deacon can preach the gospel in the assemble and need to live it by his actions as a representative of the Church in the community.

In today's gospel Jesus is criticizing the showy religious practices of the Pharisee and the scribes. The Mark's Gospel was written for the non-Jewish Christian community of this time, the gentiles, the Greeks, and there was some animosity between that Christian community and the Jews. Bible scholars say that it is likely Mark took some liberties with this parable for the benefit of his audience. His portrayal of Jesus criticism of the Pharisees may have been a little harsh. And in the history of the church, unfortunately, this passage was one that gave fuel to the anti-Jewish sentiment. Pope Saint John Paul II publicly apologized for this during his time leading the Church.

We see from Mark's gospel that Jesus is not impressed by the example that the scribes and Pharisee are providing to the people. He tells his audience to listen to them, follow their instructions, but don't be like them. He points out that, after all, they are sitting on the chair of Moses.... they have the

authority..... they should be listened to, but please don't try to be like them. His advise is—don't follow their example, don't compare yourselves to them. And why would he say that? The Pharisees were really trying, they were trying to be holy people in the way the religious law of the time required them. But in any culture when you have a group trying to look better than, there's another group that is feeling worse than. So Jesus reminds us we have but one teacher, and we are all brothers and sisters. The Christian idea is a lot more level. Christian disciple keeps their focus on a life of humble service, we know that the greatest will be humbled and the humble will be exalted in the Gods eyes. Every one of us deserves all of God's mercy, grace and love the way we are, we don't have to try to be someone else to get it. I'm not saying we aren't required to try to be better people, of course we are, conversion to Christ is a life-long process.

We could look at it this way.... It has been said—especially in these days of social media that comparison is the thief of joy.

Comparison is the thief of Joy. We are a culture of people comparing ourselves to each other. The devil loves this trick. He loves to rob us of our confidence in God's love by making us think how much worse off we are than other people, how much better they are than us, or how much better we are than them.

We have to guard against this. we all fall for it at one time or another....If the devil can't make us hate ourselves, he'll make us hate someone else because they're better, smarter, more capable....more.....whatever. Either way it's a trick. The Devil, the divider, he want to separate us from one another and from the love of our Heavenly Father— both to our detriment.

We all need to remember that our walk with God isn't about how we compare with anybody else We kinda have to be person God made us to be. We really can't be anyone else. We all have

our individual walk with the LORD. I'm sure you all remember that point in the Gospel of John where Jesus asks Peter three times "Do you love me Peter" and then he makes him promise to "Feed my sheep" that is guide my people, lead my church, and all Peter can do is say is "What about him" what about John—the beloved disciple? Jesus answer to that says "What concern is it of yours?—you follow me." Peter is comparing himself with John, and Jesus is saying so what about him...so what? You follow me.

There is a lesson here and in today's gospel that most all of us can learn. Our worth, our self worth and our worth in the eyes of God, has nothing to do with how we measure up against anyone else. We are all unique and beautiful children of the father and it is what we have in our hearts that counts.

The minute we start worrying about how much better better you are with Facebook, or——- how much better you are in

comparison to someone else, picture Jesus saying “So what, you follow me.” When you become convinced that you’re never going to be as successful and patient or pious as someone, listen again “So what, you follow me.” We need other people in our walk with Christ. There’s no question about that. But the minute we take our eyes off him and focus on them, everything starts to go wrong.

Let’s keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the leader and perfecter of the faith, and see if we don’t find ourselves champions in the end.

Let’s forget about who we think we should be or how we look next to somebody else. Put that aside and just follow him.

