Ready to Wear the Stripes?

As I turned the calendar to September this week, I have started thinking about the upcoming basketball season beginning in the middle of October and another year of basketball officiating. This will make my 26th year of officiating in the state of Wisconsin.

I often try to recruit others to join me on the basketball court officiating and quite often the answer is a quick "NO". Many of us like to critique how an official does their work from the sidelines, but many will not get on the court or the field.

In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus calls us to help our brothers and sisters in their lives and especially try to offer some guidance when it comes to their faults. Of course, that is not an easy thing to do. Last weekend, Father Doug spoke about the young people showing their animals at the fair and the time and commitment that they needed to prepare their animals. The young people are judged by the quality of the animals and the way that they present the animals. I am sure that the judges help the young people to understand what flaws they had and help them to understand that if they correct those, they will score much higher in other competitions.

This is also reflected when officiating a sport. Many times on the basketball court, I may call a foul. Then, if the player is open to it, I lend a teaching moment to share with the player on what they did wrong and try to help them avoid that in the future to become better basketball players.

You see the thing in life, is that we will always encounter those who want to let us know when we go astray and work to protect us and the people around us. It may be a police officer, court judge, teacher, employer etc.

So when it comes to our secular and spiritual lives, we also all need some guidance and direction to help us to do better. Who among you when we have a fault, would like it to be pointed out to us? I would imagine that very few of us like to have our faults pointed out to us. But we truly need to examine what our faults and our shortcomings are in order to be better in our own lives.

I am sure that not many of you really look forward to a job evaluation, especially if you know yourself what your shortcomings might be. A had an employer that I worked for (and I think this actually might be common now) that wanted me to do my own job evaluation and that he would then sit down and talk to me about it and offer some

suggestions on improvements in an area of weakness. I found that, I was in most cases harder on myself than my employer was.

Many of you have asked the question, how can we help correct someone who is going the wrong way in life? Simple, just put on a referee shirt or a judge's gown and tell them that they have to listen to you. Well of course, that most likely will not work.

You know when Jesus himself lent advice to people, he rarely judged them harshly. He would use parables and examples to help them think about the wrong direction that they were going in life. He would often have them answer a question he presented to them. For example, "he who is among you without sin, you cast the first stone."

I think back to the time that the prophet Nathan told King David a story that reflected the wrong direction that King David was going. King David soon realized that it was himself that was in that story.

It is hard to look at someone who might be going the wrong way and try to correct them without feeling judgmental. But I think that we must approach people with a love of helping them to avoid a situation that is leading them in the wrong direction. I also think that it is important to pray about it and ask Jesus for advice on how to help. For in the Gospel today, Jesus reminds us that where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst. I know that if we open our minds, Jesus himself would lend advice.

Maybe you will find in prayer an underlying issue that the person who you are trying to help is going through. Maybe it is something else that you are totally unaware of. Take the time to pray about it yourself and ask God's guidance always.

God is not asking us all to put on striped shirts this week and be a referee, but He is asking us to help one another to avoid faults and help grow into a deeper relationship with Him and with each other.

So this week, I invite you to spend a little time in prayer, maybe to ask God to help you evaluate yourself and also to ask for assistance in helping people with gentleness and love to move past their faults and to truly experience life in a more beautiful and faith filled way.

God's Blessings

Deacon Jim