

A few years ago an English soccer team won the local League Cup championship --- a very big deal. They were so happy they took teammate Steve Morrow, and tossed him into the air. Unfortunately, they failed to catch him when he came down, and poor Steve had to be carried off on a stretcher with a broken arm and an oxygen mask. (*Dynamic Preaching XXV, I, p.55.*)

The Moral: Many are the people standing around cheering when you're going up; perhaps fewer are there to catch you when you crash down. We all need friends and people who care about us on our hard days. J. Wilbur Chapman says the scriptures show 40 specific people healed by Jesus personally and directly. Of these ... six found their way to Jesus on their own. The other 34 were either taken to Jesus ... or Jesus to them ... by friends. 34 of 40 found the healing of Jesus through others!

In the Gospel today, four friends carried the paralyzed man to Jesus. Or, if they weren't friends, they at least decided to act friendly because someone was paralyzed and needed help. What a beautiful picture of a healthy diocese or parish. Jesus in the middle, and people carrying the paralyzed to him, bringing the paralyzed in through prayer, through invitation, through creating warm inviting liturgies ... bringing people through the doors, windows, even holes in the roof. Chapman's statistics suggest that the normal way people get to Jesus is either you're in need and someone carries you, or you carry someone ... because carrying someone is a great way to get to Jesus..

The ratio of persons who carry others vs. people who are carried is four to one in today's Gospel. That's pretty optimistic. In most parishes I know, including this very wonderful one, many many more people are carried than carry. Think of the liturgy. The people who carry it ... priests, lectors, ushers, environment people, musicians, servers and so forth ... are not as many as those who show up and want to be carried. Or charities outreach: the people who actually do it are fewer than those who just sort of sit still and hope someone else does something. Finances the same. Maybe 150 families do the serious carrying of the parish, while others give a token and hope to be taken care of.

I'm not saying this to be down on you. Nobody can carry everybody or everything. And in the end, salvation comes to us because Jesus chose to carry that cross.

But there is a concrete way priests throughout the diocese are challenging you to carry today. It's the ABA: Annual Bishop's Appeal. Those on the parish list already know that today is when we take up the pledges.

Without people carrying him, our bishop would be paralyzed in doing some of our church's work. Your brochure told you about it. The parish also gets a lift, once the diocese's goal is reached. This year we plan to spend \$15,000 to fix up the hall, \$15,000 to reduce our debt for Cislini hall, and put an additional \$15,000 into our parish charities fund, to feed the hungry. There will be a lot of needs this year.

Each family is asked to pledge \$250. We are all aware that times are tough and some people will have no money at all to give. They are paralyzed financially. No shame in

that. But those who aren't paralyzed are asked to do some carrying. Don't consider your donation as "paying your share." Remember that some people can't pay their share. If you are able to carry the bishop and parish in this collection, please consider doing so. Take a few minutes now, fill out your pledge form --- there are extras in the pew if you left yours at home ... and put them in when the ushers take up the collection. Thanks!

And ... Landings ...