

I hope we did our heart exercise for this past week –which was to find a quiet place, and to take some quiet time and LISTEN to the Good Shepherd who calls out to each of us, and then to be willing to follow where the Lord is leading.

I don't know how it was for you listening last weekend, but delivering the homily last week just totally drained me. And so perhaps for your sake and definitely for mine, I thought it would be best to do something somewhat light this weekend – so a story.

A true story as told by Scott Adams. And if you don't know who Scott is, you will by the end of the story.

Scott begins by asking, “What is the value of a kind word? Well let me tell you.

“In January of 1986 I was flipping through the channels on TV and saw the closing credits for a PBS show called, ‘Funny Business,’ a program about drawing cartoons.

“I had always wanted to be a cartoonist but never knew how to go about it. I wrote to the host of the show, Jack Cassidy, and asked his advice on entering the profession.

“A few weeks later – I got a very encouraging handwritten letter from Jack, answering all my specific questions. He went on to warn me about the

likelihood of being rejected at first, advising me not to get discouraged if that happened. He said the cartoon samples I had sent him were good and worthy of publication.

“So I got very excited, finally understanding how the process worked, I submitted my best cartoons to a few magazines and quickly received back cold, form letters of rejection.

“Discouraged, I put my art supplies in the closet and decided to forget about drawing cartoons.

“A year later – out of the blue – I got a second letter from Jack Cassidy. This was certainly surprising since I never thanked him for the original advice. Here’s what the letter said:

*Dear Scott,*

*I was reviewing my “Funny Business” mail file when I again ran across your letter and copies of your cartoons.*

*The reason I am dropping you this note is to again encourage you to submit your ideas to various publications. I hope you have already done so and are on the road to making a few bucks and having some fun too.*

*Sometimes encouragement in the funny business of graphic humor is hard to come by. That’s why I am encouraging you to hang in there and keep drawing.*

*I wish you lots of luck, sales, and good drawing. Sincerely, Jack.*

“I was profoundly touched by that letter, largely, I think, because Jack had nothing to gain, including my thanks, if history was any indication.

“I acted on his encouragement. I dragged my art supplies out of storage and inked the sample strips that eventually gave birth to *Dilbert*. Now 700 newspapers and six books later, things are going pretty good in Dilbertville.

“I feel certain that I would not have tried cartooning again if Jack had not sent that second letter. With a kind word and a postage stamp, he started a chain of events that changed my life and reaches all the way to you right now.

“As *Dilbert* became more successful I came to appreciate the enormity of Jack’s simple act of kindness. I did eventually thank him, but I could never shake the feeling that I had been given a gift which defied reciprocation. Somehow, ‘thanks’ did not seem to be enough.

“Over time, I have come to understand that some gifts are meant to be passed on – not repaid.”

Scott Adams continues by saying, “Each of you knows somebody who would benefit from a kind word. I’m encouraging you to do it sometime soon. For the biggest impact, do it in writing. And do it for somebody who knows you have nothing to gain.”

It's important to give encouragement to family and friends, because their happiness and yours are inseparable. But for the maximum effect, I'm suggesting that you give your encouragement to someone who can't return the favor – it's a distinction that won't be lost on the recipient.

And remember, there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read that Paul and Barnabas “strengthen the spirits of the disciples and exhorted them to persevere in the faith.”

Those words of encouragement created a ripple with no logical end. It affects us now and we, in turn, must begin new ripples of encouragement within the Church today by strengthening the spirits of those around us – in our family, and in our Spirit-filled community of faith at Holy Family.

And that's our heart exercise for this week.

- To give an encouraging word to someone else
- To lift their spirits
- To help them have hope
- To let them know that someone does care
- To help them have courage in difficult times
- To help them believe in the goodness of God.

We may never know the difference those kind and encouraging words may make to someone, but they will have an effect.

When we do love one another, as Jesus asks us to do, we are always giving gifts that are meant to be passed on, not repaid.

And God bless you for all your encouraging words to me this past week.