

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Is there anyone here who hasn't made a lame excuse about something you don't want to do? My dear Sister, Gerri, has used this one way too many times when invited to some event she doesn't want to attend: "Oh, I'm so sorry! I'll be in the Bahamas that week!"**

**The Washington Post recently ran a contest for the best excuses people had for not showing up on the job. The three winners were:**

**If it's all the same to you, I won't be coming in to work. The voices told me to clean all the guns today.**

**When I got up this morning, I took two Ex-Lax in addition to my Prozac. I can't get off the john, but I feel good about it.**

**My stigmata's acting up.**

**Then, there are the excuses supposedly from parents concerning their children's absence from school:**

**My son is under a doctor's care. Please execute him.**

**Dear School. Please excuse John being absent on January 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33.**

**Sally won't be in school on Friday. We have to attend her funeral.**

**Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault.**

**EXCUSES! We all make them.**

**In today's Gospel text, Jesus encounters two people with seemingly, pretty good excuses for not following him with the same urgency of Peter and Andrew who quickly walked away from their boat, their business, and, presumably, their families when Jesus said, "Follow me." Similarly, James and John left their father, Zebedee, in his boat, and immediately went to Jesus, when he said, "Follow me".**

**The first person in the Gospel today when called by Jesus to follow him, responds, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." Now, we don't know if the father just died or his father was very sick and about to die or that some day, some time, his father would die, and he wanted to be there when that day came. Whatever the case, Jesus response seems pretty harsh, "Let the dead bury the dead. But you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God."**

The second person says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." That sounds perfectly reasonable to me. But Jesus responds, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Kingdom of God." Here Jesus seems to condemn this person for his desire to simply say good-bye to his family. What's that all about?

Jesus believed in the urgency of NOW. For the truly important things in life, there is urgency.

Consider, if you will, the simple act of expressing our love for the people we hold dearest in our lives. Expressing such love simply cannot be put off.

One of the most poignant loving relationships I have ever been blessed to encounter was the love between Tug and Tim McGraw. As most of you know Tug, the great relief pitcher who helped both the New York Mets and the Philadelphia Phillies win world championships, denied that he was Timmy's father until they met when Tim was 18 years old, and the resemblance was simply undeniable. Eventually Tug introduced Timmy to some people he knew in the music business and the music career of Tim McGraw took off.

Tug was working for the Phillies as a pitching coach in Spring Training in 2002 when he became ill and was quickly diagnosed with brain cancer. He sent word that he wanted me with him, so I flew to Tampa. Though he never asked for him, Tim happened to be doing concerts in Florida, and he went immediately to be at his father's side. When I arrived, Tim had already take charge. He sought out the best doctors in the country to treat his father's condition, cancelled his concert tour and stayed by his father's side. For the next year Tim provided everything he possibly could, and visited him as frequently as possible, until Tug died, even taking him to his own home in Nashville so he could die surrounded by family.

In my last visit with Tug before they left for Nashville, I told Tim how much I admired him for the love and care he provided for Tug, and he simply said, "No regrets! I never want to regret not loving him enough." Tim McGraw understood the urgency of NOW.

There is an urgency to loving. Children grow up so quickly. Aging sneaks up on all of us. There are people whose love we treasure today who might not be with us tomorrow or next week or next year. There is an urgency about the really important things in life. Parents, spend time with your kids now. They'll be gone all too soon. Children, make time for your parents. They'll age quicker than you think, and then they'll be gone. Like Tim McGraw, never have to regret not loving them enough. And husbands and wives please, please make time for each other. Someday the kids will be gone and all you'll have is each other. Don't wake up some day being strangers to each other.

**Remember, the best way a mother can love her children is to love their father; and the best way for a father to love his children is to love their mother. The urgency to love is NOW.**

**There can sometimes be an even greater urgency about changing your way of life. Every day, in almost every family in America—rich and poor; black, white, Hispanic, Asian; religious and irreligious—that lives are being destroyed by alcohol and/or drug abuse. How low does a person have to sink; how much money does he have to spend; how many loved ones have to hurt—before he says, “That’s it! I’m done! No more! I have to stop now before it’s too late!”**

**It’s an awful thing to wake up and realize it’s too late—too late to save your marriage; too late, you’re pregnant or got a girl pregnant; too late, you’re addicted; too late, you’ve been caught; too late, you’ve brought disgrace to your family and friends; too late, you didn’t mean to kill that person. It was an accident.**

**Can’t you see there is sometimes an urgency to change the way you are living? Stop what you are doing an inner voice may be saying to you this morning. Stop NOW, before it’s too late.**

**We, as human beings, are wired to recognize an important urgency when it comes to things that really matter. Surely there is such an urgency in our relationship with Jesus Christ. You think not! I challenge you to find one place in the New Testament where Jesus told anyone to “go home, think it over, and get back to me later”. It simply doesn’t happen. As I pointed out earlier when Jesus came to Simon and Andrew, James and John, at their fishing boats beside the Sea of Galilee and said to them, “Follow me!” they left everything and followed him.**

**Jesus rebukes the two people in today’s Gospel reading who want to delay making a commitment to him. Jesus’ invitation is always an invitation to do it now! Procrastination is a major problem in many of our lives. It complicates life in so many ways. For some it is a major block to success in our work or in our education. It often interferes in our personal relationships. Sometimes it prevents us from experiencing the beauty, the joy, and the abundance of life.**

**When Jesus calls us, he calls us TODAY. I believe there are a number of reasons he calls us with such urgency. First of all, we are creatures of habit. The older we get the harder it is to change. The road to hell really is paved with good intentions. We may have the best of intentions, but if we don’t act on them NOW, we probably never will. That is our nature.**

**The Lord also calls us with such great urgency because too many of us are wasting our time and our lives sitting on the sidelines, cheering or jeering those who are making a difference in the world. He has called all of us to make of this old world, a new world. He taught us all to pray to our Father, “Thy kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven.” By calling us into his Church, he is calling us to fulfill that prayer with every fiber of our being, with the urgency of NOW.**

**Finally, Jesus sees the world as it is NOW. He sees the ugliness of hate and war and violence and terrorism. He sees all the people of the world who are homeless; the children dying of starvation; people dying for the lack of clean water and clean air; the forgotten elders in nursing homes, shriveling up within themselves because they feel no one cares for them. What do you think being part of a loving church family could do for them? Will it be too late by the time we reach out to them?**

**Can you see now that the really important things in life cannot be put off—showing our affection for loved ones before it’s too late; ridding ourselves of a destructive habit or weakness or sin, before it’s too late; or committing our lives to Christ, before it’s too late. Christ sees that we could be so much more effective in how we use our time, our talents, and, yes, our treasure too if we would only center our lives in him.**

**Each of us, by virtue of our Baptism in Christ Jesus, have been empowered as his disciples to change people’s lives for the better; to make our communities more caring, welcoming, friendlier places to live; indeed, to change our sin-sick, hate-filled, violent, uncaring world into the world God intended it to be—Thy Kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven.**

**Giving your life in service to Christ really is urgent. Do it today! Do it with the urgency of NOW!**