

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Is there anyone here today who has NOT heard of the “Ice Bucket Challenge”? Just in case you emerged from a cave this Labor Day weekend, the Ice Bucket Challenge is being tagged by a friend, where “tagging” means “dared” to post a video of yourself being doused with a big bucket of ice water, all in order to raise awareness of and funds for research to find a cure for the deadly ALS disease.

Before the “Ice Bucket Challenge”, only about 25% of Americans even knew ALS existed. Before this past summer those who knew about this disease mostly knew it as “Lou Gehrig’s Disease”, named after the famous baseball player who made known that he had the disease that led to his retirement in 1939. In his famous “retirement” speech in Yankee stadium, he declared that despite his ALS diagnosis that gave him only a couple more years of life, the life he had already lived made him feel like “the luckiest man on the face of the earth”.

Seventy-five years later, ALS has not received a lot of funding for research, and there has been a very low public awareness of the disease. That is until this past summer. Now, all of a sudden, thanks to the “Ice Bucket Challenge”, new generations have not only been informed but also summoned to join in the fight against ALS. High school kids and college students, socialites and celebrities like Bill Gates, Martha Stewart, Will Smith, Oprah Winfrey, Triple H, George W. Bush, and Ben Affleck—all have been on-line “tagged”, that is “digitally “dared” to participate in the “Ice Bucket Challenge”. An astounding \$31 million in additional funding for research for ALS has been raised through this “Challenge”.

I especially got a kick out of former President Bush trying to explain how his participation in the “Challenge” would be somehow “un-presidential”, as his wife, former First Lady Laura Bush, sneaks up behind him and douses him with the bucket of ice water.

This week’s second reading from Romans is all about being “tagged”. As Catholics we are participants in a unique community of faith who not only believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but are so loved by God, He pours His own life into us, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, each time we participate in the Eucharist. Then we are tagged by a divine challenge, “Do this in memory of Me”. “Tagged” by Christ’s love, which “is the fulfillment of the law”, we are then called to “tag” all those we can with that same amazing, transforming, overwhelming love. We just can’t keep it to ourselves.

Like the prophet, Ezekiel, heard the Lord say to him, “You, son of man, I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel, the Lord has appointed me as watchman for this small portion of His Kingdom that we call Our Lady of Consolation Parish. Believing that, I have accepted this divine challenge.

In the Spring, I announced at a Pastoral Council meeting that I would find 12 candidates for our R.C.I.A. Program. That is the process of discernment whereby a person will consider if it is God's Will that he or she live the Christ-life with us by embracing our Catholic Faith and becoming members of our Church. I have been hard at this work in this mission all Summer. As of today I have found 9 candidates.

Have all of you seen the T.V. show, "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire"? The contestant has to correctly answer a number of questions of increasing difficulty. The contestant also has three "life-lines". He or she can skip the question or ask a friend or poll the audience.

Well, I don't particularly want to be a millionaire, but I do want to be successful in this divine challenge. I have until the end of this month to come up with 3 more candidates for our R.C.I.A. So, I am asking for your help. I am asking you to be my "life-lines".

Specifically, I am asking you to "tag" someone you know who you think would be a good candidate to become Catholic and join our parish. It can be a relative, a neighbor, a co-worker. You don't have to do the asking, if that would make you uncomfortable. You could "tag" them for me, by providing me with their names and phone numbers.

I've found among the nine that I've already "tagged", though they had been worshipping with us for many years, they simply had never been asked to join. Sometimes that's all it takes—an invitation, or a simple question, "Have you ever considered becoming a Catholic?"

Listen again to what Jesus says to us today, "Amen, amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Joining me in this Divine Challenge, I am asking you to be my "life-line" in two ways. Join me in praying that the Lord will touch the hearts of those whom you "tag" and that He will give you or me the words to reach out in love to those who are "tagged". Secondly, knowing that the Lord is in our midst since we gather in His Name, help me enlarge this community of love which is our Parish. "Tagging" a friend for Jesus is a lot nicer than pouring ice water on him or her, and they'll thank you, because, like Lou Gehrig, they will find themselves to be among the luckiest people in the world.

I know I do, and I hope you do too, every time we receive our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist.