

## Homily

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 7, 2019

Rita Antoinette Rizzo was born in 1923 in southeast Canton, Ohio, a ghetto ruled by the Sicilian-based Black Hand. Her parents are John Rizzo, an abusive husband and unemployed tailor who wanted to remain childless, and the mentally fragile Mae Gianfrancesco Rizzo.

Rita's father abandoned his family when she was just five years old, forcing Rita and her mother to move in with her grandparents. The only room available was in the attic. The neighborhood, being the center of immigrant activity, taught Rita about prostitution, the mob, holy Italian women and ethnic diversity.

Although her grandparents weren't religious, Rita's mother joined St. Anthony's, the local parish. Just a year later, the pastor moved the church to a better part of town to avoid the drug dealers who used the church property for storing their products. Rita grew up to become known for her brash personality and poor health.

Rita doesn't sound like someone destined for greatness, much less for being one of the greatest evangelists of our time.

As many of you know, Rita is known to us today as Mother Angelica, who founded EWTN. It all began with an investment of \$200 in 1981 and the tenacious spirit of a woman absolutely in love with our Lord. Today EWTN transmits 24-hour-a-day programming on television and radio to more than 264 million homes in 144 countries.

In addition to EWTN, Mother Angelica also founded a Monastery, a Missionary, a Shrine and the Knights of the Holy Eucharist. She died on Easter Sunday three years ago at the age of 92.

I must admit Catholic radio has been a big part of my faith journey. I spent many hours listening to Catholic Answers Live and other programs on my way to and from work. And I've heard many stories of people like me whose lives were positively impacted by Catholic radio.

So how many people did Mother Angelica bring to Jesus? Thousands? Millions? Me? Let's take a closer look at what happened after I find out about EWTN. It was a Sacred Heart bumper sticker. I don't remember when or where I saw it, but it may have been one of you. Yes, I've seen Sacred Heart bumper stickers on a number of cars in the church parking lot. And I've seen them around town and on the interstates. And to be honest, it wasn't EWTN that brought me to Jesus, but it was EWTN that furthered me along on my faith journey.

I was raised Catholic, baptized shortly after I was born, taken to church every weekend by my parents. When I was on my own, I went less often. When I met my wife, I went more often. And she wasn't even baptized at the time. Then I came here and met you.

My point is, all of you have impacted my faith journey, just as I hope I've impacted yours. That's how it works. We share with each other little bits of information, little pieces of the puzzle, a little piece of ourselves.

EWTN is just a piece of the puzzle. The Parish Festival is a piece of the puzzle. Our various Parish Ministries are a piece of the puzzle. What we do away from church is a piece of the puzzle. At work, on the road, in the store, wherever we are.

In today's politically charged, social media driven world, it can be intimidating to stand up for what we believe, and even harder to speak out.

Are we afraid to appear different from the rest of the people around us. Are we afraid to say, "God Bless you," when someone sneezes, or even, "bless you?" (\*)

Are we afraid to make the sign of the cross before and after the prayer before a meal at a restaurant, or even to bow our heads in silent prayer?

Would I be afraid to proclaim this homily publicly, outside the safe walls of this church building?

Very few of us are called to go two by two into the towns, calling peace to rest on a home or a town. But each of us is called to be one with Christ and one another.

We are all many parts; we are all one body. All of us are on our own individual faith journey. I have a very long way to go. But I am encouraged and strengthened by you. And I hope and pray that I encourage and strengthen you.

Seeing you here every week adds to my faith journey. Every interaction, whether good or bad, happy or sad, adds to my faith journey.

Knowing this, I have a choice; I can make it my constant effort to be a good and happy influence on those around me. Or I can choose not to. Either way, I make the choice.

That's why God wants us to be here every week, and more often if possible. He strengthens us by His Word, giving us examples from scripture how to love Him and each other. How do we show our love for Him and each other? That was a rhetorical question. Otherwise we'd be here for hours discussing the possibilities.

How else does He strengthen us? He strengthens us in the most intimate way by His very Body and Blood which we are about to come forward and receive. We need His strength to carry us on through the struggles we encounter. And we need to be strengthened often, because it's hard out there.

He strengthens us by His forgiveness; it's not the fact that we fall, because we all fall. It's getting back up, being sorry, asking forgiveness and receiving absolution, those wonderful words of absolution. We need to be strengthened often, because, well, if you're like me, we fall often.

We don't have to be like Mother Angelica or like the 72 He sent in pairs. We could, but at a minimum we are called to be Christ for one another. In the things we do and don't do, in the things we say and don't say.

That doesn't mean we have to do and say what Jesus did and said, but we can embrace the gifts He has given us and use them for each other and for the glory of God. That is evangelization.

Spend some time this week and think about how we can be Christ for one another. And if we can do better, choose to do better. It's all part of our faith journey to the place we all desire to be, together in heaven with the angels and saints in the Glory of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.