

Fr. Joe Chapter 10 ~ Maintenance In his own words...

With a small number of parishioners, little funds and few buildings, we had no hired personnel such as a secretary, janitor or maintenance man. Besides offering daily Mass, taking Holy Communion to shut-ins and visiting the sick, teaching and instructing, taking census calls, I spent a lot of time maintaining our property. I would do small repairs, painting and mowing.

I remember one day while mowing the lawn, passing up and down the lawn, a little boy sat across the road. Every time I would pass, he would yell, "Hi Jesus!"

If he only knew what I was saying to myself, he would know that I was not Jesus! Sometimes I needed help, and if the kids were in school, I would stop in a local saloon and ask if anyone wanted to come along and help. One man used to volunteer and he would go down to the mission with me and repair, paint and work on the roof. He was a fallen-away Catholic. Several years later after I left the area, his family contacted me and told me he was dying. He would not see any other priest except me. I made the trip to the home and he wanted me to hear his confession. He did not like priests, but respected and trusted me. He said because I was not like a lot of priests, I would crawl around with him on roofs repairing and painting.

I heard his confession and gave him the anointing of the sick and told him to let the local pastor bring him Communion the next day. I hope he got his reward.

I had a bigger project to face. The old barn next to our mission church was caving in and leaking badly. The boards were rotting and warping. The roof was rusted. I asked a man that I knew if he could repair it. The man was out of work with ten children to support. So he took the job. He brought picks, crow bars and block and tackle and several of his oldest boys. They jacked up the barn and laid a block foundation under it. Then they took the block and tackle and twisted the building into this perfect shape and wedged it in that position. They turned all of the weathered boards from the weather-beaten side inside out with a smooth service to the outside. Then I had some high school boys paint the sides white and the roof green to match the little church building. I do believe that this is the first straw that broke the back of prejudice. The people of the town were happy to see us beautify our property and considered us an asset to the community.

One day I took some boys to work around the buildings and Billy was one of them. Some of the boys just finished painting the front of the barn and Billy was cutting the grass around the barn area. He came around the corner and sprayed grass all over the wet paint. As I was running down to tell him to stop, he yelled, "I quite!"

I made him sit under the tree for hours before I took him home. He never forgot that, but always laughed about it. We just scraped the debris from the front of the barn and repainted it.

Many boys and girls would mow and trim the cemeteries all summer long and I would take them to the State Fair at the end of the summer. I will always remember the one time we had a good day and as we were leaving, after we ate supper, we decided to go on one more ride. Up and down and around it went twisting, my stomach got upset, I became as white as a sheet. I was sweating German donuts, so I prayed for God to help me. Suddenly the ride stopped, it ran out of gas. As they refueled, a cool breeze came up and then they let us down very gently. It deepened my faith and trust in prayer.

You might say I remembered that evening because it helped me to find prayer in my life. I always prayed a lot. I would recite formulas and multiplied words and dropped a list before the Lord at all times, but I was not really turning myself or a situation over to God.

That night in one split second, I needed help. I asked God to help me and He answered in a marvelous way. I learned then to talk to God throughout the day at any time, at any place. I tried to put everything in his hands with full trust and confidence, but He will unfold the answer in His own way and in His own time. He always does that. Now I still have to learn to listen to Him as He speaks to me in prayer. I firmly believe that ask and you shall receive, knock and it will be open to you.