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Instruction manuals!!

I’ll confess that I generally tend to use them only as a last resort. Like AFTER I realize that I have 3 “extra” screws, and the piece labeled “auxiliary capacitor module” still left over when my project’s assembly is, supposedly, complete.

It’s not that manuals are inherently evil... OK, they are evil—calling the leg of the table I’m assembling the “vertical stabilizing unit” instead of, ummm, the “leg”—that’s pretty evil.

Why can’t instructions be simple and straightforward?

The people of Jesus’ time felt the same way.

Jesus’ conversant in today’s Gospel (Luke’s 10th chapter) is no exception. He’s a good

Jew, a scholar of the law, well aware of the 613 Mitzvot, the commandments that make up the Torah of Jewish Law—but he’s hoping for a simplified version from Jesus when he asks “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Instruction Manuals: The Good Samaritan

Jesus delivers, offering something simpler that the 613 commandments of his beloved Torah—but something much more challenging as well.

It has been said that the role of religion is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

As evidenced in today’s Parable of the Good Samaritan, and in so much of his teaching, Jesus was a fan of that viewpoint, to be sure.

This weekend, churches all over the world will be ringing with homilies and reflections on this challenge of Jesus for the comfortable to live lives of boat-rocking justice and inconvenient charity. At all the liturgies this weekend, we at SJV will be blessed with the strident witness of the Catholic Workers who, in ways far more concrete than the comfort of our well-

intentioned-but-safe checkbook Christianity, bring the Gospel of Compassion, the Instruction Manual for Christians, to full and vital life.

Where does music fit into this?

An essential role of music, whether in the world of social culture or of liturgy, has been to both tell, and advance, the Story of Humankind.

of God’s conversation with Humanity, and Humanity’s engagement with God. It is the perfect platform for the dance of Aggadah and Halakah, the crucible in which are mixed the graces of humanity and divinity. The mirror in which the B’tselem and the image of man reflect, reconcile and embrace.

And what is our Story as Church?

Yes, we hear the Story in our readings, so planfully laid out and unfolded in the seasons of the Church Year. Our prayers, crafted so carefully to unify and empower the rituals of our

worship. And our homilies, when at their best, bringing the Story home, moving us to a greater understanding of the depth, complexity and urgency of each week's readings.

But it is the music which, while not working against the intellect, helps us access the heart and soul, bringing us from an understanding of the Gospel, to a physically-experienced embodiment of it.

It is not our minds which will feed the hungry, nor our prayers—it is our imperfect yet inspired bodies, informed by our intellects and fueled by our soulful prayer, that will bring Jesus' comfort to the world.

So, this week, our minds, souls and bodies sing in our Gathering Hymn of our yearning for integrity “We Yearn O Christ for Wholeness” set, to Bach's unforgettable Passion Chorale melody.

In the Psalm we pray “Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.”

As we bring our gifts to the Altar, we pray “The Servant Song.”

At Communion, we petition “Christ, Be Our Light.”

And as we go forth into the world, we remind ourselves “We Are Called.”

More than just choosing music that “fits the theme” each Sunday, a music director must be

constantly aware that he or she is setting a menu which will become, in time, the diet of the assembly that gathers each week.

Is the food substantial? Is it genuine and honest? Is it chosen with invitation in mind, and presented with engagement as the end result?

In the end, the crucial question is: does the music help us move from an appreciation of our story to a living of it?

An ancient Latin adage reminds us “Quod orandi, quod credendi”—what is prayed, is what is believed.

May what we pray in our music not only truly reflect, but, enfolded and ever-vital, become, what we believe.