

Artfully Done --

“That may be the best question ever asked in a lesson on Confirmation.”

by Bob Kloos

We are all familiar enough with those short questions asked of Jesus that are followed by some of the most poignant lessons. “What must I do to gain eternal life?” the lawyer asked. [Mt 10,25] And the parable of the Good Samaritan followed. Or when asked if it was lawful to pay taxes or not, Jesus simply said, “Show me a coin.” [Mt 22,19] We all know what happened after that.

Questions often serve as a turning point for teachers and lecturers. Questions pinpoint confusion or shoot up a flare. The question from one can speak for many. The rare question raised by a Confirmation candidate can indicate the lesson plan has come close to home.

It was just before last Thanksgiving when I was launching into a two-hour Confirmation program with junior high students at Saint Anselm Parish in Chesterland. After the opening prayer service I began with my typical opening remark: “Any questions?” I always want the candidates to know that our sessions are open to whatever is going on in their lives at the time.

A young man right in front of me spoke up: “Did you see the Browns game last weekend?”

“Nope,” I said. “But I heard there was a fight before the game.”

“Yah,” the young man said. “It was sweet.”

The red flag went up in my head.

“Teachable moment,” I thought to myself. “Build on this. Everyone is listening.”

“I didn’t see that game,” I repeated. “And I didn’t see the Indiana vs. Detroit game last Friday night, or the Clemson vs. South Carolina football game yesterday for that matter. But I understand all three turned into a hockey game.” Laughter and small talk ensued with several high-fives.

[For those of you who are ESPN challenged, two professional and one college game scheduled that week will be remembered not for the score or skillful play but for the brawls that erupted.

William Green of the Browns and Joey Porter of the Steelers started what both benches finished.

Indiana Pacers Ron Artest will miss an

entire year’s play and pay for his hurtling seats while hurling punches at a beer-tossing fan in the stands. And neither the Clemson University Tigers nor the South Carolina’s Gamecocks accepted Bowl bids after their 10-minute fight during the fourth quarter of their game.]

“So if last Sunday’s Browns game was the one I chose to bring my son to watch,” I spoke up to get back the students attention, “during what point of the pre-game fight do I turn to him and say ‘these are professionals’?” Silence. “And if he happens to catch the news clips of fans pouring beer and throwing popcorn at coaches ushering Pistons and Pacers off the court, how do I explain these athletes are the cream of the crop and get paid millions?” Deeper silence. “I’m sorry. I was not impressed by any of what you call ‘sweet’.”

Everyone is waiting for the next word. It comes from another student. “What would you do to somebody who spits in your face?”

“Great question,” I said. “And that’s one of the reasons we talk about stuff like this in a session preparing us for the Sacrament of Confirmation. It’s good to know ahead of time what to do when a situation invites a response.” I paused for just a moment and asked the question again, “What should we do?”

The same answer came from at least five different people: “Knock his lights out!” More high fives.

“Is that what the gospel calls for? Is that what disciples do? Should our response be just like the ‘professionals’ on the field?” The students were more bewildered than convinced. I had a lot more work to do.

“I think it is the Gospel of Luke that suggests that when we are struck on one cheek, we should turn and offer him the other as well.” I did my best to remind them all that the gospel is the reason for our sessions. A hand shot up. It belonged to a young man who was obviously popular in the group, often surrounded by his friends.

“You’re telling us that if somebody hit you, you wouldn’t hit him back? You would just stand there?”