

Easter 6 May 21, 2017
Acts 2:5-8; 14-17
1Peter 3:15-18
John 14:15-21
We Must Speak

There is a saying that, in my opinion, does some amount of disservice to Catholics. It's the saying, "Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words."

It comes from an oversimplification of an episode in the life of St. Francis. It's a good ethic in itself and there are certainly those of us who could use a reminder of service to God.

But I think that this saying has been embraced by our generation as a comfortable means for ignoring our call to spread the Gospel. Generally Catholics are pretty good at helping the needy or being generous with our money.

But we're also called to be generous with speaking about Jesus Christ to the world.

Action is necessary, yes . . . but there is more. The commission of our faith and baptism requires our actions AND our words.

Both are required for evangelization.

Our first two readings lay out this reality . . . a reality that many of us nervously shy away from.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear that Phillip “proclaimed the Christ” to the people of Samaria and they “paid attention” to what he said! Then he served the sick and the possessed with signs and wonders done in Jesus’ name. The people were joyous!

Phillip was not an apostle; he was a deacon who had been called forward in service to the Apostles. Phillip couldn’t call forth the Holy Spirit for the people there, the Apostles Peter and John come later and do that in what is their confirmation . . . just like we’ve been confirmed and received the Holy Spirit. And as I mention confirmation: remember that in our confirmation we all received the very gifts of the Holy Spirit to be able to speak and work and accomplish the task we’ve been given to share Christ with the world.

Those gifts are wisdom, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, understanding, piety and fear of the Lord. . . and whatever else God may give each of us for our service to him.

But it all started with Phillip preaching Christ to them.

Suddenly all kinds of things begin to happen.

This is the same Phillip who would be taken by the Spirit to meet the Ethiopian from the Queen's court who was reading the Scriptures with no success. The Holy Spirit worked so that Phillip could explain the Scriptures and preach Christ to this seeker.

Which takes us then to the second reading where Peter tells us all to always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks us for the reason for our hope in Christ.

He exhorts us to doing good . . . but we must be ready to speak as well. Peter is telling us that it's not enough to profess "that" we are . . . but "why" we are.

Again we have words and actions . . . hand in hand.

Guardian Angel's parish has a multitude of people who are willing in an instant to help others in need when called upon. We've seen this time and time again. We're blessed! We even see this on a broad scale as the Church responds to all kinds of needs at home and overseas. People are generous with their treasure.

But you know . . . the moment the opportunity or call to speak Christ out loud to another comes along . . . strange things begin to happen.

- We begin to sweat!
- Pulse rate goes up!
- Our minds go blank!
- People that easily sell used cars or coach a sport's team are suddenly speechless and helpless.
- Men who have led troops into battle are suddenly without courage.
- People who generally consider themselves less than creative come up with all manner of excuses about why they can't talk about Jesus or the Gospel.

There are those who throw up a barricade declaring that their dealings with Jesus are personal . . . as are everyone's . . . and therefore we should not bother each other with all this.

Now it's true that Jesus loves each of us personally . . . but Jesus does not belong personally to any of us. He is ours to share with the world! And the Scriptures are clear that this is done in word and action.

John's Gospel says that Jesus has asked the Father and He has given us an Advocate to be with us always. This means that when we need to act or speak in faith, the Holy Spirit will guide us in it. And certainly the Spirit of God can be trusted, so we can draw courage from that in the nervousness or heat of the moment.

Three weekends ago my son was on a company trip in Las Vegas. He and two friends were walking along the strip in the middle of the afternoon. While they were talking a man, obviously under the influence, came across the sidewalk and slugged my son's friend up side of the head.

My son told me he was amazed at two things. First, the guy took the punch and stayed standing. (Tough guy, I guess.) But the second thing was that while my son was ready to jump on the guy, his buddy called him off and told them to let it go. The drunk stayed and tried to provoke a fist fight, but the guy just quietly stood there until the drunk left.

A Christian man in action! Turn the other cheek!

Strength under control!

The effect on my son was profound.

Two weekends ago I had occasion to do a baptism. Afterwards the parents brought the baby to our Marian shrine and we dedicated the child to the care and protection of the Blessed Mother.

A little later I noticed a father with his little boy in his arms.

That feeling came over me and I asked the man if he'd like to have his little one dedicated as well. He got a strange look on his face and then began to tell me that they weren't Catholic and he didn't know exactly what it was.

I then had the joy of quickly sharing the fact of Mary's love for all of us and that because of Jesus she wants to help us all as she helped her Son. He asked me if it mattered at all that his son, a down syndrome child, had been dedicated at Crossroads church. I said no, Mary is here for us all. So the guy grabbed his wife . . . I explained it to her and we went over and dedicated the little guy . . . whose name was Owen.

Next thing you know four more kids came up and we placed them all in the hands of our Blessed Mother.

Owen wasn't baptized when he left . . . but I know he was in good hands: two loving parents and the Blessed Mother. And

hopefully the parents would think about what was said and done.

At the end of the day a pretty good harvest . . . just for the simple thing of speaking of Christ.

So often it's the seemingly insignificant details of what we say and do that can lead someone to conversion.

We are called to speak and act. Both take courage. Both take practice.

Both take knowing what we're about . . . which may take a little effort on our part. But when we look at the many meaningless things that some strive to understand or excel at, isn't sharing the hope and humanity worth the effort?

I knew a man who could recite the winners of every major horse race since Man-of-War. But as far as his faith or who Jesus is . . . well, he didn't have much to say.

We do no one any good if we hide our faith behind fear or claim ignorance.

We may not have the gifts that Phillip had to work signs and wonders . . . or to speak eloquently. But we do have gifts . . . and we can speak . . . and we can learn.

Yes . . . it may mean we have to know a little of the Bible.

And yes . . . may need to learn a little about how to defend the faith.

But most of all it requires that we have the heart for it. And that comes from taking the time and getting to know Jesus a little better.

And you can believe . . . that this is what Jesus wants more than anything else.

Somebody in this world cared enough . . . and made the effort . . . to pass the spark of faith and conversion on to each of us.

Because of that we all want to go to heaven and be with God when we die.

In the joy of that thought alone . . . why not care enough and make enough effort . . . to bring someone with us when we do!