

## Sixth Sunday of Easter May 29, 2011 A

### ALWAYS BE READY TO GIVE A REASON FOR YOUR CATHOLIC BELIEFS TO THOSE WHO INQUIRE OF YOU

In the second reading today, Peter states: “*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope but do it with gentleness and reverence*” (1Pt 3:15).

This verse could be interpreted on two levels: spiritual and theological.

On the *spiritual level*, the verse exhorts us to be always ready to witness to our faith. Millions of believers belong to a church family today because of the witness of other believers. This is especially true of Protestant evangelical churches. Their leaders have done a great job at teaching and inspiring their people to witness to their Christian beliefs and in motivating them to invite others into their church. While we all know that ‘*witness of life*’ is more important than ‘*witness of words*,’ words are also important—especially when people are going through a tough time spiritually. If the Samaritan woman in John 4 had not been willing to share her witness with the people of her village, they might never have come to know Jesus. Fortunately for them, she had no desire to keep her encounter with Jesus her best-kept secret.

I sometimes wonder how many people are lost to our Catholic Church because so many of us are timid about inviting others to church or sharing our faith with others. Needless to say, ‘*witness of life*’ is our best advertisement for our faith. After all, St. Francis of Assisi used to say: “Speak the gospel always. If necessary use words.” Sometimes, example is the best way to go. But sometimes, example can and should be accompanied by words. In the often used words of the late Pope John Paul II: “Do not be afraid.” Do not be afraid to share your faith. Do not be afraid to invite a non-churchgoer or a seeking non-Catholic to church. I do know that some of you have grown very much in this area of your spiritual development because I have met people who now come to our church because of your good example and witness.

On the *theological level*, the above verse from our second reading could also be interpreted to mean that we Catholics should be prepared to explain to others why we believe what we believe. I acknowledge that this is not an easy thing to do for the majority of Catholics, especially those who go through life with an elementary school understanding of their faith.

Thankfully, more and more Catholics are making time to become educated on Catholic beliefs and practices. More and more are becoming skilled at explaining, among other things:

- why we have certain beliefs and devotions to Mary and the saints (see Art. 10 of my Catechism articles).
- why we have the practice of confession (see Art.15).
- why we believe Jesus founded our Church and intended for the Pope to be the successor of St. Peter; why we believe in papal infallibility when it comes to matters of faith and morals (see Arts 8 and 9).

### Being a proud and humble Catholic

There was a period in our Church’s history when we Catholics believed that we were better than everyone else, and that we were the only ones to go to heaven. The recent clerical sex scandals have humiliated and humbled us—and rightly so. But such horrible failures in our church should not lead us to be ashamed of our church. We always have been, and always will be, a church of sinners. If there was one condition for entry into our church, the sign on the door would read:

Despite the terrible sinfulness of the church down through the ages, God has used this weak instrument to do many great things. In his introduction to his book *Rediscover Catholicism*, Matt Kelly gives us some great reasons why we as church should be humbly proud of its achievements.

- *Education.* The Catholic Church is the institution that educated the masses of people who were not born into nobility or wealth. Matt Kelly writes:

*The global reach and contribution of the Church is enormous, but the national impact of the Church on every aspect of society is also impressive, though largely unknown. In the United States alone the Catholic*

*Church educates 2.6 million students every day, at a cost of ten billion dollars a year to parents and parishes. If there were no Catholic schools, these same students would have to be educated in public schools, which would cost eighteen billion dollars. The Catholic education system alone saves American taxpayers eighteen billion dollars a year.*

*In the field of secondary education, the Church has more than 230 colleges and universities in the U.S., with an enrollment of seven hundred thousand students. And the Catholic and non-Catholic students educated in our schools and colleges go on to occupy many of the highest positions in any field. (p.18)*

**Healthcare.** The Catholic Church has a nonprofit healthcare system comprising 637 hospitals that treat one in five patients in the United States every day.

· **Outreach to the poor.** After the federal government, the Catholic Church in the United States helps the poor more than any other agency or institution. Wherever a global disaster occurs, Catholic Relief Services is present and helping. At home, *Catholic Charities* and many other Catholic agencies are on the front lines of outreach to the poor. Here in our own city, our Church is vigorously involved in outreach to the poor through our Thrift Store, Social Concerns, participation in Daily Bread, Habitat for Humanity, etc.

· The Catholic Church has produced thousands and thousands of holy men and women. While holiness is the work of God in the life of an individual, the individual must cooperate with God's grace. We need guidance and help as we seek to live a holy life. Millions of us have found that help and guidance in the Catholic Church.

· Down through the ages, especially in the Middle Ages, the Church has been a great patron of the arts—which elevates the human mind and heart to God.

While the sex scandals have caused us rightly to hang our heads for a while, we have so many good reasons to be proud of the achievements of our Church. It would be sad if we allowed the sins and imperfections of the Church to prevent us from recognizing its tremendous accomplishments.

### ***What sets them apart?***

In recent weeks, we have sold 2,250 copies of Matt Kelly's book *Rediscover Catholicism—A Spiritual Guide to Living Life with Passion and Purpose*. One of the things I like about Kelly's book is that it inspires us to be the best that we can be, to be the best version of ourselves. The following is an excerpt.

*What is it that sets those who achieve extraordinary things apart from the rest of us? Some people would tell*

*you it is mere chance, that they simply found themselves in the right place at the right time. Others will tell you that these favored few had better connections with people of power and influence. Some people believe that God has favorites and these men and women are his chosen ones.*

*Do not allow your heart and mind to be deceived. There are two great differences between the heroes, leaders, champions, and saints that fill the history books and the rest of us. In the first place, they tended to have a singleness of purpose that penetrated every activity of their lives. And in the second place, they formed habits that helped them to achieve their goal. These weren't the mindless habits that are acquired by choosing the path of least resistance and maximum pleasure, but the life-giving habits that lead to excellence and holiness.*

### ***Singleness of purpose***

*As you study the lives of extraordinary people, you will discover that they are all marked by these two qualities. It doesn't matter if it is Bill Gates, Michael Jordan, or Mother Teresa; these characteristics can be found in each of their lives. Bill Gates wanted to dominate the software industry. He clearly defined his goal and thus had singleness of purpose. Then he developed habits in his life that would help him achieve his goal. Michael Jordan wanted to become the greatest basketball player in history. He had a clearly defined goal, a singleness of purpose. He did the things that moved him toward his goal and didn't do the things that didn't move him toward his goal. The same is true of Mother Teresa and of all the saints that honor the pages of Christian history. Mother Teresa wanted to love God with all her heart in every moment of every day. She clearly defined her goal and allowed this singleness of purpose to penetrate the everyday activities of her life.*

*It matters not whether it is in the field of business, sports, or spirituality. The same principles apply. They are the fundamentals of human excellence.*

*You may object, saying, "To dominate the software industry or be the greatest basketball player in history are not the noblest goals." This is true. The question now becomes, "What is your goal?" Do you even have a clearly stated goal? Do you have this singleness of purpose that gives focus to a person's life and allows him or her to excel beyond imagining?*

*This singleness of purpose will save you from wasting your life in shallow and superficial activities that mean almost nothing to anyone and will mean even less one hundred years from now. Imagine how many people wanted to distract Michael Jordan from practicing basketball. Imagine how many nights his friends wanted him to go out and party and he didn't, either because he had to practice or because he had to get up early the next morning for practice. Imagine how*

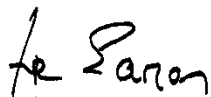
*many people tried to distract Bill Gates from building Microsoft when he was in his late teens and early twenties. Similarly, imagine how many people tried to distract Mother Teresa from her prayer time or from her work with the poorest of the poor.*

*When you have singleness of purpose, everything else is embraced or discarded according to whether or not it moves you in the direction of your goal. When you don't have this singleness of purpose, you get lost in the tossing and turning of daily life.*

*The whole world will get out of the way for the man who knows where he is going. For the man who does not, the world becomes a playground filled with distractions and nothingness. (pp 119-120)*

I thank all of you who are helping to place *Rediscover Catholicism* in the hands of thousands of people. Our job is to sow the seeds by spreading the Word. God's job is to reap the harvest.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Le Saran". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.