

*Easter 6A 2014*

*Always Be Ready*

Has anyone ever asked you why you believe, or why you continue to practice your Catholic faith? When this happens, we are usually taken aback. Suddenly, on the spur of the moment, we find ourselves in a situation when we must explain what is most personal and important to us. This is why St. Peter writes in the second reading, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” This is why Jesus promises us in today’s Gospel that he will give us another Advocate, the Spirit of truth, who will help us to remember all that he has taught us.

From time to time, people have asked me why I became a priest, and what I really believe. There are, of course, many reasons why I became a priest, and there are many things I believe. But at such moments, I try to focus on what is most personal and central. At such moments I call upon the power of the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, to remind me of the truth and the words of Jesus. The brief form of the answer I give is this: I became a priest because of a sense of calling, a conviction that being a priest would be the best way I could work out my salvation. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has come into the world to show me the way to God. For me, God’s Word is the Word of life and the Eucharist is the food of eternal life. I cannot imagine living without that word that I read every day; I can no longer imagine living without that food that I eat every day. And so I am and remain Catholic, a priest.

My answer, of course, is personal, as it ought to be. And your response will be different, as it ought to be. But whatever your answer, I am convinced that today, more than ever, we must be prepared to give an explanation to those who asks us for a reason for our hope; for when people ask this question they are searching for the truth.

It is not easy for Catholics to proclaim their faith. Many of us are afraid or hesitant to share our faith with others. We have made our faith such a private matter that we feel awkward speaking about it to others. You've heard the joke: What happens when you cross a Catholic with a Jehovah's Witness? You get someone who knocks at the door with nothing to say!

But that's not how it is supposed to be. Our Catholic faith is rich in Word and Sacrament: it is the word and food of life. As Catholics we live in a world that is bathed in God's grace, a world of forgiveness and mercy, a world of love and eternal life, a world in which we have passed from death to life in Jesus Christ. And so we have something to say to those who ask us for the reason for our hope. We proclaim, "I believe in God because of the love God has shown me in Jesus Christ. I believe in Jesus Christ because of the gift of the Holy Spirit who dwells in me. I believe in the Holy Spirit that I experience in the church every day. I believe in the church because the community of faith proclaims the gospel of life. I believe in eternal life because God has raised Jesus from the dead."

Do not be afraid. The gospel is the word of life and there is nothing to fear. It is not we who are speaking; it is the power of God's Spirit dwelling within us that is speaking.