

Homily – 4th Sunday of Easter

Preaching the Gospel has many, many meanings, but perhaps the best meaning is when it's said that we preach more, we're more successful when we preach the Gospel by what we do than what we say.

A person's life, how they live, and what they do things, and their relationships, and the way they face obstacles and disappointments preaches the gospel.

What we mean when we say that the whole world must be evangelized is that it must come to know the love of God, the truth of God, the caring of God, the compassion of God.

I thought today I would read a story that I find that sums up much of what the Gospel is about today.

There is a story of a famous actor who was invited to a town hall to do his favourite readings, a custom quite common in the days before radio and television. For a community of people would invite professional orators and actors to read well-known selections from literature and poetry, usually in the town hall, sometimes accompanied by music.

Now, when this actor, who was invited by a community to the town hall, had read a few of his own choosing, to everyone's delight, he opened it up to personal requests from the audience. If you had a favourite poem or a favourite episode from the classics, he would read it for you.

An old man, somewhat disheveled, a little bit shy, struggled to his feet and asked the actor could he read a poem from one of the psalms. He picked Psalm 23. Everyone knows Psalm 23, "My shepherd is the Lord; there is nothing I shall want."

The old man said this had always been his favourite. Some people then recognized the old fellow as a retired preacher from a small, poor church on the edge of town.

The actor thought he'd have a bit of fun with him, and, in good humour, he also would provide some amusement for the audience. He said he would be happy to read the psalm on one condition. He would read it if the old man would agree to read it after him.

Well, the frail old fellow looked somewhat reluctant and confused and a bit embarrassed, but, finally, being a good and decent man, he agreed.

The actor began, "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. In green pastures he gives me repose; besides restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul." And he continued

Homily – 4th Sunday of Easter

in this way to the very end. “Only goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.”

Well, of course, the audience responded with great applause, for the actor read the passage very, very well.

And now it was the old man’s turn.

The old preacher began. His voice was frail, and a bit halting, and a bit stumbling. And the people held back their judgment, for as he continued, in his simple humble way, they knew he was no longer reading letters from a book, but speaking the words as coming from his own heart.

And when he reached the end, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come,” his voice was but a whisper, and yet everyone in the church heard it clearly.

The audience was silent, but there was only a respectful silence and not a few tears.

The actor smiled at the old man. Turning to the audience, he said, “The difference, my people, between the two readings, is this: I know the psalm, but he loves the Shepherd.”

Today, the Good Shepherd calls us to know him and to love him, to share in his mission of healing and salvation for all the peoples of the world.

And I think it quite fitting to read just this short bit from Mother Theresa on the same subject: “Preaching the word, then, is learning how to love, how to give, how to receive God’s forgiveness; sharing responsibility for each other and for the whole world, not so much in words but always in service, always consciously aware that the Gospel message is in sharing our love together and with others.” Amen.