

**TURN UP THE FLAME, PHASE THREE  
“SHARE YOUR FAITH”**

**THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A**

Ez 37:12-14; Ps 130:1-8; Rom 8:8-11; Jn 11:1-45

***YOU CANNOT SHARE WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW:  
A SELF-REFLECTION ON  
THE STATUS AND SOURCES OF MY FAITH***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, April 9, 2011, 5:00 p.m.

Sunday, April 10, 2011, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00, and 12:30 p.m. Masses

**Today's homily** is the **first** of a **series** of homilies over the coming year on how to **implement Phase Three** of our *Turn Up the Flame* Campaign: ***Share Your Faith***.

First of all,

I would like to **thank all** of you **who have prayed** about your **involvement** in this spiritual campaign, and have **prayed** for the **success** of the campaign.

Your **prayers** are making a very **positive difference**.

I would like to **thank** the many of you who have **returned pledge cards**.

Your **intentions** are a powerful **sign** of your **faith!**

Also, I would like to **thank** all of you who are wearing your **wrists bands**, or are wearing *Turn Up the Flame shirts*, because they are **outward signs** of your own **faith**, and ways to Share Your Faith without ever saying a word.

**Phase Three** of *Turn of the Flame* is going to be **different** than the first two phases.

We are going to have **periodic homilies** on how to **implement** this,

because there are **big challenges** to overcome,

both **within ourselves** and because of our **society**.

Sometimes we are **not** very **comfortable witnessing** our faith, or **speaking** about it; and lots of people don't want to hear about our faith.

For many people, when it comes to other peoples' faith, their attitude is:

“You can believe whatever you want, but **keep it to yourself**.”

Except, this is **not** the **Jesus way!** **Jesus expects us to share our faith.**

Jesus told a man that he healed: “*Go home to your family and **announce** to them all that the Lord in his goodness has done for you*” (Mk 5:19).

“Announce” means “Share your faith!”

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he told his disciples,

“*Go, make disciples of all nations*” (Mt 28:19);

“**Teach** them all that I commanded you” (Mt 28:20).

Or, put another way, “**Take the faith that I have given you, and share it with others!**”

This is a very **timely topic**

because the **gospels** of these past **three weeks** are about **coming to faith** and then about **sharing** one's **faith** with others.

**Two weeks ago** the **woman at the well** grew in her faith about Jesus.

She went from calling Jesus

“You, a Jew” (Jn 4:9) to “Sir” (Jn 4:11,15) to “prophet” (Jn 4:19) to “Messiah” (Jn 4:29), and then she shared her faith by telling many people in town about Jesus (Jn 4:28,29).

**Last week** the **blind man** grew in his faith about Jesus.

He went from calling Jesus “that man” (Jn 9:11) to “prophet” (Jn 9:17) to “Lord” (Jn 9:38), and he shared his faith by telling the Pharisees about Jesus,

which wasn't a very easy thing to do.

And **today** we have the **greatest “Share Your Faith” statement** of all, made by **Martha**.

Jesus asked Martha, “Do you believe?” (Jn 11:26);

or put another way, “Would you please share your faith with me” (paraphrase, Jn 11:26).

Martha replied, “I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world” (Jn 11:27).

**Martha shared her faith** in front of her sister **Mary**,

and in front of the **many other Jews**

who had come to console her over her brother's death (Jn 11:19).

You and I, if we are going to “Share Our Faith,”

we need to **know what we believe**, and **where** our **belief comes from**.

If we want to tell others about our faith,

we need to **reflect** upon our **own faith**,

and be able to **put our own faith into words**.

When we look at the **gospels**,

there are **three major ways** that people **came to their faith in Jesus**:

a **personal encounter** with Jesus;

to experience or see a great **sign, a miracle**;

or on the basis of the **testimony of others**.

The **disciples** had personal encounters with Jesus.

So did the **woman at the well**, the **blind man**, **Martha** and **Mary**,

and I'd bet big money that **you have too**.

I am going to share some of **my faith**, and it is very personal,

and hopefully it will **help you** to recognize similar things in your own lives.

For me this goes back a long time ago, to my **sophomore year** in high school.

I was on the **basketball team**,

the B Squad, the junior varsity, the sophomore team, whatever you want to call it.

Our team was playing St. John Prep in Collegeville on a very cold January night.

Like most kids, **sports** were a **big deal** for me.

You have no idea how much **I wanted to be** an **outstanding basketball player**.

We got killed that night, just blown out.  
I was a skinny kid, not that strong, not a starter, one of the “last subs.”  
At the **end of the game** when we were **far behind**,  
the coach worked his way down the bench, seven of us,  
and **even thirty seconds** in the game **meant a lot** to me,  
and one-by-one, everyone went into the game, **everyone played – except me**.  
Eleven played, one did not.  
I was embarrassed, humiliated, mad, sad.  
You’ve never seen anyone **shower so fast** after a game.  
And out to the **school bus** I went, the first and only one on the bus, **alone**.  
The windows were all frosted on the inside, covered with ice.  
I don’t know why **I prayed**, but I just did:  
“**Jesus, only you can know how sad I am right now.**”  
I didn’t ask for anything.  
I just told Jesus how I felt.  
I was just a 15 year old kid in one of the lowest places I had ever been.  
And what happened next was absolutely remarkable.  
I felt this **overwhelming presence of Jesus**.  
It was as if he sat down **in the seat right next to me**.  
And **Jesus spoke to me**, “Michael, you are going to be OK, things will turn out all right,”  
and a **peace** came over me that I had never experienced before.  
And **Jesus was right**.  
The **bus ride** went **OK**. No one teased me. No one made fun of me.  
And the **next day, mysteriously, miraculously**, I received a lift from my low spot,  
and I was **able** to pick up and **carry on**.

I don’t need to read in any book that Jesus is real.  
I don’t need some televangelist to tell me, “Come to Jesus!”  
**Jesus is real. I’ve met him. He is with me.**  
He **helped me**. He has **changed my life**.

Jesus is the reason that I am before you today as your priest and homilist.  
He’s the reason we are doing Turn up the Flame. How did I get here?

I’ve had **many encounters with Jesus**, but because of time, I’ll only share one more.  
After coaching and teaching for fourteen years as a religious brother at Crosier Seminary,  
the seminary closed and I landed in Nebraska at the **new head boys basketball coach**  
at **Central Catholic** High School in Grand Island, Nebraska,  
and I lived at the Crosier Monastery in Hastings, 22 miles away, me, age 37,  
the **youngest member** of a community of almost all **old and retired**.  
It was a morning in June and I was at the community Mass.  
The **priests** were **so old** and decrepit that it was just awful.  
Fr. Joe Smerke had a terrible cough, and he was hacking away.  
This one was slumping, that one was limping, the next one was drooling.  
Honestly, it was a **terrible sight**, downright **demoralizing**.

I had been praying for **guidance** with regard to **my vocation** for years.  
**Jesus** was right there **with me at that Mass**,  
and Jesus, pointing at all of those old priests, asked me,  
“**Michael, who is going to succeed these men?**”  
“Are you going to be among those who are going to be my **next generation of priests?**”  
And before I coached a single basketball practice at Central Catholic,  
I knew that my time in Nebraska would be short.

I have had many personal encounters with Jesus. I hope that you have too.

The **most powerful** way to share our faith is not something we have read in a book,  
but to **share a personal encounter** that we have had with Jesus.  
One of the most important steps of this process is to **look back over our lives**,  
and to **identify personal encounters** that we have had with Jesus,  
and then, once **in touch** with **the story**, we will be able to **share the story**.

The **second** of the **three major ways** to come to **faith**  
is to be able to **recognize signs** and **miracles**.  
The people at **Cana** saw **water turn into wine** (Jn 2:9).  
The people at the **Pools of Bethesda** saw **Jesus cure a cripple** (Jn 5:18).  
The crowd on the **hillside** saw **Jesus feed 5000** from **5 loaves and 2 fish** (Jn 6:1-13).

This is **not** about **book-faith**, what we have read about.  
This is about **signs** and **miracles** that **you** and **I** have **seen** or **experienced** in our own lives.

You know that I like to go up to **Lake Superior**.  
When I'm sitting by the shore at **Gooseberry Falls** or **Split Rock Light House**,  
and I see the morning sun, the crashing waves, the bluffs, the trees, the water over the falls,  
and the **beauty** of it all, it is awesome, the **work of no human being**,  
and I catch myself praying, “It is **you, Lord**, in your majesty, who **created all of this**.”

You know that I've been **injured**.  
Ten years ago I ruptured my **Achilles tendon**; I had **surgery**, and was in a **cast 4½ months**.  
I am **completely cured** when **100 years ago** I would have spent the rest of my life as cripple.  
It is by the **healing grace of God** that I am able to walk.  
I've had **pneumonia** three times, and I was **deathly ill** a couple of those times.  
One hundred years ago, before the time of antibiotics, I'd be **six feet under** already,  
on the **dark side** of the **grass, pushing daisies**.  
**Here I am**, thanks to **the healing grace of God**.

It is nice to pick up the gospels and read about the cure of the lame man at Pools of Bethesda,  
or the blind man by the Temple,  
but I don't need to read about other people to testify about the healing power of God.  
The **healing power of God has worked in my life**,  
and because of **signs** and **miracles I have experienced**,  
my **faith** is **stronger**, and I am **able to share** my faith with you.

If you want to be able to share your faith, I would invite you to **go over your life**.  
**Where** are the **miracles**? Where are the **signs**? Where are the **healings**?

The ones that you have experienced? The ones that you have seen in others?  
We have to be able to **recognize** these events,  
and be able to **name** them, to **describe** them,  
to **share** them with others.

And finally, **one last item**, really **short**, but really **important**.

The **third** and last major **way** to **come to faith** is by **the testimony of others**.

**Andrew** told his brother **Peter** about Jesus (Jn 1:40-42).

Likewise, **Philip** told **Nathanael** about Jesus (Jn 1:45).

And in today's gospel, **Martha** shared her faith in Jesus with her sister Mary (Jn 11:27).

So, as we reflect about our own faith, it is **very valuable** to **look back**  
to **identify** those **key people** who have **shared their faith in Jesus with us**,  
who have **passed on** the gift of **faith** to us.

For me, this will be no surprise to you, it is **my dear mother**.

When I was growing up, when I was little Mikey,

she **told** the **Jesus story** over and over again, and she **taught me my prayers**.

**My dad** modeled the importance of going to **Mass** and devotion to the **Eucharist**.

**My grandma** taught me the **Jesus way** of being **kind to other people**.

The **Sinsinawa Dominican sisters** taught me about Jesus in grade school,

and the **Crosiers**, like Fr. Ken Opat, who **shared so much faith with me in community**.

And you, over my years here, **YOU** have shared **your faith with me** at Masses like this.

We need to be able to **identify** and **name** those great individuals  
who have shared their faith in Jesus with us,  
and to be able to **explain** the **impact** that they have had on us,  
**if** we hope to be ready to **share our faith with others**.

Over these **next weeks**, I would like to ask you to **reflect** on **three** important **questions**:

First, how have **you encountered Jesus personally** in your own life?

Second, what great **signs** or **miracles** have **you experienced** yourself, or seen in someone else?

Third, **who** has **shared their faith in Jesus with you**? And, what impact has it made?

Maybe **we** can be **like Martha** and how she shared her faith.

When **Jesus** asked, "*Do you believe?*" (Jn 11:26).

**Martha** said, "*Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world*" (Jn 11:27).