

**THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A  
GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY**

Acts 2:14,36-41; Ps 23:1-6; 1 Pt 2:20-25; Jn 10:1-10

**TURN UP THE FLAME  
PHASE THREE: SHARE YOUR FAITH  
*SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH A SPIRITUAL FRIEND:  
GOD IS IN THE STORY! GOD IS IN THE ENCOUNTER!***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun  
Saturday, May 14, 2011, 5:00 p.m. Mass  
Sunday, May 15, 2011, 8:00, 9:30, and 11:00 a.m. Masses  
12:30 (Spanish) and 6:00 p.m. Masses

My friends, over the years **my homilies** have covered **many very important topics**, and **today's reflection** is one of the **most important** that I will ever bring before you.

“Amen, amen, I say to you” (see Jn 10:1a),

we are in a major “capital” campaign: ***Turn Up the Flame!***

This campaign is about the **most important** thing of all:

not raising money, but **raising faith**.

The whole **reason** that we come to church, worship, and receive the sacraments, is because we believe in **Jesus Christ**.

Every one of us has a **lamp** with a **flame of faith in Jesus**, the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11,14).

We need to keep our **lamps trimmed** and **burning** (Mt 25:7).

We need to **fan the flame**.

Currently we are in the third and final phase: **Share Your Faith**.

Our **faith** is **not a private matter**.

Maybe you would prefer not to talk about it, but we really don't have much choice.

Before **Jesus** ascended to heaven, he told his followers (us):

“**You** will be **my witnesses** ... to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

**Jesus wants us to be his witnesses**.

A **witness** lives his or her **faith in front of others**, publicly,

and a witness is able to **speak about** his or her **faith**,

to testify, to give testimony, to **tell the story**.

A **month ago** we had a **special homily** on how to **reflect upon our own faith**.

Today we are going to explore some **concrete ways** to **share our faith**,

for **starters**, how to **share our faith** with a **trusted spiritual friend**.

If charity begins at home, then **faith sharing begins at home**.

Hopefully, we won't have to look too far.

**Ideally**, the **person** of choice lives **within the same house** where we live.

The **object** is **not to convert** someone to the faith,

but to be a **partner** with someone that we already know and love,

for both to **grow in faith together**, to turn up their **flames together**.

If a person lives **alone**,  
or if the people in your house are **not** on a **similar spiritual wavelength** with you,  
the person for faith sharing might be someone here at church,  
or someone at work,  
or someone that we call a lot on the telephone,  
or someone that we go on vacation with.

### **Share your faith!**

When it comes to **faith sharing**, it is not so much a list of beliefs.  
It is much more, "**How God is alive in my life.**"

There is a little spiritual slogan or motto worth remembering:  
**God is in the story.**

I **learned** about this in an **unexpected way** when I was **coaching cross country running**.

I had a group of about 40 high school boys in the fall.  
I was duped by **American secular values: winning is everything**.  
At the beginning my coaching career, I was **a man on a mission**.  
My goal was to get a team to the **state meet**.  
The first eight years we missed,  
but on years nine, ten, and eleven (and 13 and 14),  
**my runners** won the conference, the district, and the region titles,  
and **went to state three years in row** (5 in all).

After watching the **glamor of victory on TV**,  
our **victories** were **fun**, but I **expected** them to be a **bigger thrill** than they were.  
We got the trophy, achieved a lot, went home, and **LIFE WENT ON**.  
Over time I came to realize that the **greatest thing** was **not** the **victories**,  
but the **time we spent together**.

It was the morning practices, the afternoon practices,  
our dreaming together, our hopes and aspirations,  
the warm ups, the competitions,  
our celebrations on the good days, consoling each other on the bad days,  
the bus rides, the dinners together when we got home,  
and the **friendships** that we made, friendships that have **lasted for years and years**.

Last year I presided for a wedding for one of my former runners.  
It was not the wins or the losses that were **most important**: it was **the journey**.

You see, when we went out running at 6:00 in the morning,  
and there was frost on the grass and snow flurries in the air,  
all of us shivering, a few even complaining, **God was with us**.

And when we lifted weights in the gym, all working together, **God was with us**.

And when we traveled on the bus, rocking to the tunes, **God was with us**.

And when we sat down together for dinner and recapped the day, **God was with us**.  
My friends, **God is in the story**.

**Every one** of us has a **different story**.

**God** travels **with us every step of the way**.

**God** is our **constant companion** on the **journey through life**.

**God is in the story**.

What a **blessing** it is for you and me to be able to **realize** how **God is there with us**:

blessing us with good things, helping us through our trials, ever present.

What an **honor** and **privilege** it is to **share our story** with another person,

**not only** the **events** of our lives, **but how God is part of them**.

When **two people share** their faith, God is especially present.

Remember the promise that Jesus made,

*“When two are gathered together in my name, I am there with you”* (paraphrase, Mt 18:20).

It is a supreme act of **trust** and **love** to take **our story**, which is so **sacred** to us,

and lay it before another person.

**Faith sharing** has the potential of **transforming a relationship**,

to make it **deeper, stronger, and more meaningful**.

Not only **is God in the story**,

**God is the encounter**.

There are some **important techniques** to this.

**Faith sharing** is **never one-sided**.

If we want others to listen to us,

we need to **be willing to listen** to them.

If we want others to treat our story with respect and reverence,

we need to **be willing to treat their story** with **respect and reverence**.

Somebody has to start, and the most generous approach is to offer to **listen first**.

The ideal is to set our story and concerns aside for a little while (Phil 2:7a),

and **listen** as **attentively** as possible to our loved one’s story.

We must **not interrupt**; we must **not change the subject**.

We need to **encourage** and **accept** with **smiles** and **head nods**.

Instead of switching the subject to ourselves, which is a constant temptation,

we can **ask little questions** that help them explain themselves better.

We need to be **gently interactive, little comments, support, appreciation**,

and express our **sincere thanks** that our loved one

would share something so sacred and personal with us.

As we listen to their faith sharing, **God is in the story**,

and as we spend time together, **God is in the encounter**.

**Our approach** to faith sharing is **critical**.

The **process** that I just described is **gentle** and **respectful**.

Jesus was never **“hard sell.”**

Jesus was **not pushy**.

Jesus did **not demand** or **threaten** or try to **induce guilt**.

Jesus made **gentle invitations**, and that is where he left it.

When it comes to our approach to sharing our faith with others,

there can be **nothing “high and mighty”** about it.

**No aloofness or arrogance or pride** is permitted.  
Our approach must **never** be **pushy** or **aggressive**.  
If there is anything harsh or demeaning about what we have to say,  
it is not the Jesus way.  
Our attitude can never be, “I’ve got the truth, and you need to hear what I have to say.”  
**Jesus made gentle invitations, and we need to be gentle, too.**  
**Faith sharing** is about **respect** for the other person,  
and a **willingness to listen** to their story,  
and hopefully their willingness to reciprocate, to listen to our story.  
Remember, **God is in the story**,  
the other person’s story, and your own story,  
and **God is in the encounter**.

**Faith sharing cannot be forced.**  
Many times it just comes up **spontaneously** in conversation.  
The goal is to be ready to seize the moment.  
The **ideal time** is when the **other person is ready**.

**Faith sharing can be arranged.**  
One person can offer to another,  
“I’d love to hear your faith story.  
Let’s talk about it **in the car** tomorrow on our trip up north.  
Let’s go out to a restaurant and share our stories **over dinner**.”

The **best places** to Share Our Faith are the **ordinary places** where we live our lives:  
at the **kitchen table** at home;  
sitting out **on the deck** on a sunny afternoon;  
**in the car** on a trip;  
**at a picnic table** up camping;  
**in the boat** out fishing;  
wherever we can have some **quality private time** together.

I invite you to **think about who you might have a faith exchange with**,  
a **trusted spiritual friend**, to **share your stories**.  
It might be your husband or wife,  
your son or daughter, your mom or dad,  
your brother or sister, a co-worker, someone at church,  
someone in your building, a teammate, someone in your neighborhood.

It is a **blessed moment** to **share our faith**, whether **a little** or **a lot**.

Yes, **faith sharing** is a **risk**, but it is a risk well **worth taking**.  
The **potential benefits** are **enormous**.  
If we share our faith, it will take **our faith** to **another level**, a higher level,  
and it has the potential of giving a **faith boost** to **someone we love**.

My friends,

*Turn Up the Flame* is so much more important than your garden variety capital campaign. Really, it is not that hard to throw some extra money in the collection.

It is much **more difficult** to put our **faith in action**,  
and to live our **faith** with **courage** and **conviction**.

**Jesus wants us to be his witnesses!** (Acts 1:8).

We are his witnesses when we **share our faith stories** with each other,  
and **God is in the story**,  
and **God is in the encounter**.

My **greatest hope** for all of us on this Good Shepherd Sunday  
is that the **flame of our faith** would burn **higher, hotter, and brighter** (Mt 25:7),  
that **our light** would be set up **on the lampstand** and **shine brightly before others**,  
so that they would **see our flames**, our **light**, and **give glory to God** (Mt 5:15,16).