

ME Encouraging U – Bulletin Insert (9/29/15)

One of the biggest obstacles that gets in the way of our talking about our Christian faith with our neighbours is *the fear that we won't be able to answer the questions that people may ask us* or that we won't have a suitable response to the challenges that the skeptics or critics may put before us.

This Sunday's Gospel lesson (Mark 10:2-16) has Jesus facing just such a challenge. Of course, He has the perfect answer. He answers with the Scriptures, the God-inspired Word. In this case Jesus relates the Creator's institution of marriage (this Sunday's Old Testament lesson Genesis 2:18-25) in speaking with the Pharisee's, and builds on the Sixth Commandment in speaking with His disciples.

What better response can we make to those who challenge and question us about our faith than to follow Jesus' example and speak God's Word to them. But I can hear many of you saying that you're still afraid that you won't have the right Scripture to respond with. **Well, here are 4 encouragements in response to that fear:**

1. **Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.** (Col. 3:16) Dive into God's Word. Drink in the Word proclaimed each Sunday (readings, sermon, and the liturgy, too!). Study the Word at every opportunity (privately, with your family, and at church). Fervently pray the beautiful collect:

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

2. **Follow St. Paul's example,** "*I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*" (1 Cor. 2:2) One of the things that stuck with me from last weekend's EvangelFest was Pastor Fisk's emphasis that the apostles' preaching throughout the book of Acts focuses on proclaiming Christ's death and resurrection. He encouraged us to answer the challenges of the pagan world around us not with apologetic defenses but first with the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified and raised. As Pastor Fisk said, "*Until they are on the same page with us about that, they will never understand the faithful answer we would give to their question or challenge.*"

You may be saying to yourself that this all sounds too simplistic, that it sounds like the typical child's response that the answer to every question about "church stuff" is "Jesus"!

Those thoughts lead right into encouragement number...

3. **Jesus says,** "*Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*" (at the end of Sunday's Gospel Mark 10:15) Here Jesus is speaking of simple, childlike trust; a total dependence on our Father in Heaven. You have been a child of your heavenly Father from the moment of your baptism. You can trust His promises to answer the prayer quoted in #1 and all your prayers. You can trust Him who has sent you His Spirit who will remind you of all the things Jesus has spoken and will give you the words you need to proclaim His good news of salvation. You can trust Him who right now is taking you in His arms, laying His hands upon you, and blessing you! (Mark 10:16)
4. **Now in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son.** (Heb 1:2a) Another gem that stuck with me from EvangelFest 2015 came from Pastor Bublitz when he talked about how he agreed with the adage "Children should speak only when spoken to." He said that since God has spoken to us in Christ, now we can and ought to speak in response. St. Peter said, "*Have no fear of them*" (people who would harm you, cause you to suffer, revile you, etc.), "*nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.*" (1 Peter 14b-15a)

We children of God can speak without apology because
God has spoken to us.

We have something worthwhile to say because He has spoken to us
by His Son who gave His life for the salvation of all.

We children of God can do this without fear because God is at work
doing all of the above things in and through us.

And the results are His responsibility.

All glory be to God alone!