

Sample for Easter Homily

After my Easter homily at the 8:30 Mass at Saint Mary's, there were people who wanted a copy, but I had not written it out. The following are some of the things I mentioned in that homily.

Father Tom Faucher

The readings for Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter are filled with many people. From those who cheer Jesus on Palm Sunday to the crowds that denounce him on Good Friday, from the apostles and others who dine with him at the last supper to the people who testify against him at his trial, from the soldiers who arrest him in the garden to the soldiers who look over him as he dies – it is a varied bunch.

One striking thing about almost all of these people is that they show a noticeable lack of courage, and most of them are men. From Peter to Pilate and on to the scribes and High Priests they are men who show no level of integrity. Peter denies Jesus. Pilate does not want to kill him, and the religious leaders say they “have no king but Caesar.”

In sharp contrast to the weakness, cowardice, pathetic, and self-serving actions of the men are the courage, integrity and strength of the women in the story. There are not many of them, but they are truly great.

In the Palm Sunday account of the passion, from the Gospel of Mark, an unnamed woman, comes to Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, and anoints him. Some of those present, who would by custom be men, are indignant and Jesus responds, “Amen I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

She is the first of the great women of the passion story. As the story progresses, the apostles go with Jesus to the garden and fall asleep, ignoring the suffering of Jesus. It is a man, Judas, and male guards who arrest him and take him to the High Priest's home for a mock trial. The apostles run away in fear. While male witnesses falsely testify against him, Peter denies him. Pilate does not want to kill him, but does so to satisfy the High Priests and scribes, while the crowd, again by custom all male, asks for the release of a murderer. The male Roman guards mock and torture him.

In the Gospel of Luke Jesus talks to the weeping Daughters of Jerusalem, the only people publically showing their faith in him as he carries his cross. As he dies, it is women who are there at the foot of the cross, with the only male being John. They all could have been arrested for being there.

And it is the women who go to the tomb on Easter to finally care for the body. It is to a woman, Mary Magdalene, to whom Jesus first appears, and it is she who becomes the messenger of truth by going and telling the apostles.

The list could go on, but the point is that during the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the men are worthless and the women are strong and faithful.

So what does that tell us for today? It is clear that when it comes to religious

courage and conviction, women have a great deal to teach all of us men. Of course there have been many men who have been courageous and faithful in the last 2000 years. And while there are many women saints, they are more honored for being virgins than leaders. There are no male saints with the title “Virgin and Martyr”.

But those women who have been leaders are truly inspiring, including Theresa of Avila, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, Clare of Assisi, Dorothy Day, and the founders of many religious orders, such as Mother Theresa, Katherine Drexel, Francis Cabrini, and Maria Concepcion Cabrera Arias de Armida — when women are in charge good things happen.

This is also true of great spiritual leaders such as Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Bridget of Sweden, Margery Kempe, Machthild of Magdeburg, and modern women like Thea Bowman and Joan Chittister to name just a few. The very fact that we are not familiar with most of these names is even more proof of how little the church values women.

The bottom line is that when the still male dominated church does choose to, or is forced to, put women in positions of both administrative and spiritual leadership the Gospel is lived out in vivid nurturing ways.

If the church is going to grow, prosper, and fulfill its role as Jesus wanted, it has to do more to open itself to the incredible and wonderful gifts that only women can bring to it. The woman with the alabaster jar and her story need to become the norm.