



Home Mission Sunday – 16 September 2012 Homily Notes and Intercessory Prayers

Below are 3 suggested outlines for homilies based on the Sunday readings, linked to this year's Home Mission Sunday theme.

Homily 1: *Confident in Faith: Thinking in God's Way*

Jesus' rebuke of St Peter in today's gospel finds a parallel in an encounter between the newly elected Pope John XXIII and his personal secretary in 1958. Pope John mentioned to him the inspiration of calling the Second Vatican Council, after only 5 days as Pope. The secretary appeared to pour cold water on the idea, like Peter's remonstrating with the Lord on announcing his forthcoming passion in the gospel. Pope John's secretary recalls the conversation: 'I can't say I was enamoured of the project. It seemed to me that at the age of 77 John XXIII could have been content just to advance a little further along the lines marked out by his predecessor. One evening, coming out of the chapel after evening rosary, I got the reply my doubts and fears deserved: "You haven't yet shed yourself; you're still concerned with the impression you make. Only when a man has trampled his ego under his feet can he be truly free. You're not free yet. You think I am old. You think I'll make a mess out of this enormous task. But that's not how you think with faith."

'Confidence' literally means 'with faith'. Pope John was an icon of this confidence, because he had trampled his ego under his feet and so was free to think as God thinks. This is in contrast to Peter who wanted to stay in control and thereby was in danger of being a stumbling block to what God wanted to do. This is how Pope John outlined the purpose of the Second Vatican Council in his Opening Speech: 'We have every confidence that the Church, in the light of this Council, will gain in spiritual riches. New sources of energy will be opened to her, enabling her to face the future without fear.'

Being willing to witness confidently to one's faith is a way renouncing self (Gospel), of trampling our ego under our feet, of being prepared to be vulnerable and risk ridicule (first reading) to make way for what God wants to do through us. On Home Mission Sunday may our expectant prayer be that our encounters and conversations with others be marked by such fearless confidence.

Homily 2: *Confident in Faith: Punching Holes in the Darkness*

Robert Louis Stevenson remembered as a child being fascinated by the strange figure who each evening went along the street with his ladder lighting the gas lamps. One time his mother, seeing him with his face pressed up against the window watching the lamplighter at work, asked him what it was he found so fascinating. The little boy replied, 'I'm looking at a man punching holes in the darkness.'

Faith expressed in practical ways (second reading) is 'punching holes in the darkness'; it is the ignition of all our actions; it is our energy and the driving force of our good deeds. Thus faith is the way we serve society, like the lamplighter. The Second Vatican Council encouraged us to see the Church as engaging with the deepest joys and hopes of humanity. Faith expressed in action was affirmed as the duty of all the baptized and one of the most effective forms of evangelisation.

Pope John XXXIII's secretary at the time of the Second Vatican Council is still alive. Reflecting recently on the legacy of Vatican II, and referring to its four most important documents, he has written, 'We know today more than ever who we are and where we are going (Lumen Gentium), what language we should speak and what message we should convey (Dei Verbum), how much and how hard we should pray (Sacrosanctum Concilium), what attitude we should adopt towards the problems of contemporary humanity (Gaudium et Spes).' Poignantly he adds, 'If Vatican II has not yet achieved its goals, this means that our conversion is a task yet to be fulfilled.'

On this Home Mission Sunday let us pray for our ongoing conversion in this regard and resolve to seize each opportunity to share our faith with others as an explicit way of expressing that faith in action.

Homily 3: Confident in Faith: 'Daring to Speak Up'

The introduction to the Lord's Prayer in the new translation of the Mass includes the mysterious phrase: 'we dare to say.' If we do an archeological dig on that word 'dare' we find it right there in today's gospel: 'he said all this quite openly' (Mark 8.32). The word literally describes the open and up front way we talk to those with whom we are close. This is the way we are called to pray to the Father: 'quite openly.' With all the freedom and frankness of a friend to a friend, with all the confidence and trust of a child to its parents, with all the daring of a son or a daughter.

But this word is also used of the characteristically confident way we are called to speak to others about our faith. The first time it is used in the Bible is to describe how the Israelites held their heads high after their escape from slavery (Leviticus 26.13). It is the word used again and again in the Acts of the Apostles to describe how boldly the first apostles spoke about the risen Lord (cf 2.29; 14.3; 28.31) It is the particular quality Peter and John exhibited in the presence of the Sanhedrin and which so astonished them (4.13). This confidence is meant to be the distinctive characteristic of every Christian in their missionary call.

In the gospel Peter 'spoke up', declaring 'You are the Christ' (Mark 8.29). Let's seek this particular grace on Home Mission Sunday: of daring to speak up confidently, 'quite openly', about the Lord whenever the opportunity arises.

Useful Quotes possibly for the Parish Newsletter on Home Mission Sunday:

'It was in this spirit that Pope John called the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, thereby turning a new page in the Church's history: Christians heard themselves called to proclaim the Gospel with renewed courage and greater attentiveness to the "signs" of the times.'

Pope John Paul II, from his homily at the Beatification of Pope John XXIII, 3

'No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus Christ and for our neighbour impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers.'

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 166

'We cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ: they are meant for everyone ... It is our responsibility to pass on what, by God's grace, we ourselves have received.'

Pope Benedict, Verbum Domini 91

Suggested Intercessions for inclusion in the Prayer of the Faithful:

1. For the Universal Church - that the lives of her members may be a blessing to the world and help to bring many others to the true joy of believing - let us pray to the Lord.
2. For the evangelisation of our nation on Home Mission Sunday - that our daring to speak up openly for Christ may bear rich fruit in this land - let us pray to the Lord.
3. For those facing difficult situations and finding it hard to believe – that they may know God's compassion and love in all their need – let us pray to the Lord.
4. For everyone gathered around the Lord's table today - that we may be more effective ambassadors for Christ by daily showing our faith in action - let us pray to the Lord.

Heavenly Father, hear our prayers and give us the grace of growing ever more confident in our faith, for the glory of your name and the salvation of your people. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.