

“The Deacon’s Litany of Hope” (Homily)

Deacon John Fulton, St. Kevin Roman Catholic Church, Warwick, Rhode Island

May 21, 2017 – 6th Sunday of Easter

(Lectionary: 55; ACTS 8:5-8, 14-17; PS 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20; 1 PT 3:15-18; JN 14:15-21)

“Beloved:

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Always be ready to give an explanation

to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” (1 PT 3:15)

After I read the Lectionary for this Sunday, I found myself coming back and back again to this passage from Peter’s letter. I couldn’t get it out of my mind. Why? I asked. Do I not have hope? Do I not appear hopeful to others? Do I not offer hope to others? Did I not preach recently on this very subject?

And as I meditated on these questions, it came to me, that although I have hope, and appear hopeful, and offer hope, and have preached about hope, it came to me that I was not always ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks for a reason for my hope. And so, I pondered this, and asked the Lord to help me, to help me meet Peter’s challenge, as it were, to have an explanation, to be ready to give it: to be ready to give a reason for my hope.

As I asked the Lord for help, my mind began to fill with images, some dim, as if long past, some bright, as if yesterday: images of people—scores of them—people who had brought me hope, people who announced the Gospel with gentle smiles and small kindnesses, who went about in peace, glorifying the Lord by their lives, people in whom the Spirit of the Lord dwells:

My Grandfather, who gave me respite from very unhappy parents,
and Mrs. Nickelsburg, who picked the thorns off the roses so I could carry them to my mother,
and Neddy, who made the little boy upstairs feel safe and welcomed,
and Naomi, my first friend, so gentle and kind,
and Mrs. Smith, who baked me *that* birthday cake,
and Miss Bradley, who taught me to own mistakes,
and Artie, whose home was a peaceful sanctuary,
and Johnny Mullen, who let me be a best friend,
and Mr. Grimaldi, who made a new student feel as if he’d always belonged,
and Mr. Antoniak, who taught me to keep my eye on the ball,
and Faith, who taught me “to man up,” to respect women, to dream, and so much more,
and Mr. Silverberg, who got me through the darkest morning of my life,
and George, who always encouraged me,
and Bob, who always listened,
and Tommy, who gladdened the hearts of so many, including my own,
and Marilyn, who said, “John, you’re a man, now,” though my Father never said it in 91 years,
and all the holy priests who Mentored me,
and a hundred more, and even more than that.

The memory of each of these beloved friends fills me with hope, because in each and every one, I see Jesus—alive—spreading the Good News—not on a soapbox, with golden eloquence, but in the kitchen or in the garden, at work or at school, keeping the commandments of the Lord and making today’s Gospel come alive, because they are surely “in the Lord,” and just as surely, the Lord is in them.

And this is the reason for my hope: The Lord did **not** leave me an orphan! He has come to me. I have seen him. He lives! He lives in those who love him, who keep his commandments, and who preach the Good News of Jesus Christ—every day—with their lives.

Thanks be to God!