

Fr. Curtis Miller

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Sixth Sunday of Easter

“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.” St. Peter gives us good advice in this passage from his first letter. We should always be ready to explain to others why we have faith in God, why we have hope. If we don’t have reasons for our faith, then when someone questions us or a difficult situation confronts us, we might just give it up. If we don’t take the time to think seriously about why we believe, then these challenges to our faith can easily catch us unprepared and overwhelm us. We need to take the time to build our house not on sand, but on solid rock.

Likewise, we need to have an explanation for our hope. Now having hope does not mean that everything in life goes perfectly easy for us. On the contrary, hope is the virtue we have during hard times. If people can see that we stay hopeful, even when times are hard for us, that makes our witness to our faith all the more compelling. It’s easy to keep faith when things are easy, but if we do it when things are hard, people might be more interested in the message about faith we have to share. They will want to learn where we get our peace and strength to endure life’s challenges.

One way to put our faith on a firmer foundation is to practice how we would explain it to someone if we were asked. I knew a catechist in a religious education program in another parish who asked his Confirmation students to come up with an “elevator speech,” a brief explanation you could give to someone in the time it takes to ride an elevator from one floor to another. (I know we don’t have many elevators around here, but use your imagination.)

Seeing as we’re not actually in church right now, let’s try this out at home. For our purposes today, let’s practice giving it in 30 seconds. That might seem too short to some of us, or too long to others. But let’s try it. Right now. If you’re sitting there with someone else, take some time to explain why you have faith to that person. If there are two of you, maybe take 15 seconds each. If there are a lot of you, feel free to pause this video to give everyone a chance. If you’re on your own, just pretend how you would explain it to someone else. I’ll keep the time, 30 seconds. Don’t just fast forward through this part. I think it’s an important exercise, which might help us to put into words some things we’ve taken for granted or kept under the surface. This will also help us to always be ready, just in case someone asks you someday why we believe. There are 30 seconds on the clock. Go. [Keep time for 30 seconds.]

How was that? Did you run out of time because you had so much to say? Or did you struggle to find the right words to explain something so deep and personal? There’s no shame, either way. This is just practice, but hopefully this gets you thinking, so that you’ll be more ready to give an explanation for the reason for your faith. Since I asked you, it’s only fair to do it myself, too. So here’s mine. I wrote down the first thoughts

that came to mind that I could say in 30 seconds, so this isn't polished. (Feel free to time me.)

“I see beauty, order, and goodness in the universe around us, and in my own personal experiences. I believe that this could only be produced by a Being Who is all-powerful, good, and loving: God. I find the Catholic Church's teachings about God compelling, especially about Jesus. I don't think anyone could have just made up such a powerful story: that God became man, sacrificed His life to save us all, even though we sin against Him, and then rose again. Jesus' life and teachings have positively transformed countless people's lives and the world for the better.”

It's hard to put it into so few words! There's so much more I could say, but that's what comes to my mind first. I'll keep working on my “elevator speech,” and I encourage you to do the same. Who knows, maybe today or this week someone will ask us why we believe in God. This little exercise might help us to put into practice St. Peter's advice to be always ready to give an explanation. But the first person we should be able to give an explanation to is ourselves. It's only if we know what we believe and why we believe it that we can share our faith with others.

Now it's important to note that not everyone knows wants to hear us share about our faith. We also have to be prudent to do this at the right time and place, otherwise we could be putting people off. Some people might want to engage us in a debate or argument about our faith. That's not the point of what we're trying to do though. Sometimes a debate can be fruitful and enlightening, but we shouldn't be focused on winning a debate, but in earnestly sharing our faith in hopes of benefiting the other person.

Finally, we should always call upon the Holy Spirit to help us find the right words to share with that particular person and that specific moment. We don't want to just have a rote speech memorized. It should be more personal and real than that. It also doesn't depend upon our cleverness or how smart we are. If we open our hearts, and give the best explanation as we can, even if it's not perfect, the Holy Spirit will work through us. Ultimately, it is God, not us alone, Who can touch and transform hearts.