

Throughout my long and checkered careers I have had several life lessons on being an “expert”. The first was when I was at Camp Drum, New York back in 1977 for Winter Warfare Training. I was lined up with my unit and one of the NCOs in charge of the training came out and said; “All the expert cross country skiers fall out and gather over to my left. Everyone else stand fast.” I looked at my buddy and asked; “Have you every been an expert?” He said “No.” I said; “Me neither; come on.” And we both went to join the experts. We learned 3 things. First, being an expert was as much a matter of attitude as it was of skill. Second, we were actually better cross country skiers than a lot of the guys who were claiming the expert title for years, and finally, it was a trick! After a couple of days of enjoying ourselves we were all made instructors and had to teach all of the novices.

The second lesson was over many years. I noticed that when I gave advice or instruction to my own team, there was always a debate. It was the same in almost all of the organizations I ever belonged to. But at the same time I was considered a subject matter expert on certain systems and procedures by several higher and numerous outside organizations. Of course, those other organizations were more than 50 miles from home.

My experience wasn't unique; in fact you may even say that it was biblical! Ezekiel is called by God to be a prophet in this reading from the second chapter of the book of Ezekiel. If you continue on to the third chapter, God takes a moment to explain to Ezekiel that if he were to send him to a foreign country, or to where they spoke a different language, the people would listen to him and respect him. But since he was being sent to the children of Israel, his own people, they would refuse to listen to him, since they also refused to listen to God. (Ez 3:5-7)

In today's Gospel, Jesus goes back to the town where he grew up and interprets scripture in the temple on the Sabbath along with

the other adult men in the village, as was their custom. But unlike the other men he spoke with authority and in doing so he ruffled their feathers and rubbed their fur the wrong way. He made them angry because he refused to meet their expectations as a carpenter's son.

He had grown up with them; he fixed their broken furniture and made new furniture for them. He was the son of Joseph and Mary, a good kid, never caused any trouble, supported his family, competent worker, but a prophet; the worker of mighty deeds? Inconceivable! His neighbors, brothers and sisters; (actually cousins; ancient Hebrew didn't have a word for cousin so close relatives in the same generation were called brothers and sisters.) wouldn't allow him to reach such lofty heights in their minds.

They knew him when he fell down and cried as a child, the remembered the embarrassing bout of stomach flu when he was 12, they knew that the girl down the block had a crush on him since they were 13 and he never responded to her. Even though he was the Son of God, and therefore without sin, to them he was just the kid named Jesus who played in the street in front of their shop. They just couldn't get past that image to see him as the Christ, the Messiah.

The statement that Jesus had difficulty performing any miracles doesn't seem to make any sense unless you remember Fr Gaul's homily last week, particularly as he spoke to the importance of faith when we encounter God and ask for his favor. Does Jesus have to consider the faith of the person when he responds to a particular request? Of course he doesn't! He is God! Jesus can decide to eradicate cancer from the earth and it would be done in less than a heartbeat.

Jesus, God has decided that the faith of the person or persons making the petition will have an impact on the outcome, therefore it does. God is always true to himself; therefore the lack of faith in

his home village prevented any great works. The problem was with the people, not with Jesus.

So what does all of this have to do with us? Lets look at just two topics today. The first is the seeming contradiction between faith and reason. For many these are mutually exclusive concepts, but when we actually apply reason to the use of reason, we find that they are mutually supporting concepts. When we use the scientific method we painstakingly record the observations of our experiments to test our hypothesis. Seems totally based on reason doesn't it? Take something, add, apply or subtract something to it or from it and you should get a measurable result.

Seems totally devoid of faith, or is it? Does the scientist use calipers on the microscope lenses to see if they are ground correctly? Are the chemicals tested by the scientist to ensure that they are pure? The answer is no. The scientist trusts, in other words, has faith that these items are correct, that other people have done their jobs. In our daily lives, we have faith in the mechanic who fixed our brakes on the car; we believe that the pilot of the airplane we are flying in at 30,000 feet over the ocean is competent. We place our lives in the hands of people we may never know every day and don't give it a second thought.

But... Have faith in God? How unreasonable! It seems so unreasonable that we can't even get people to use reason to explain their faith. When we break it down, the empirical evidence of the human experience demonstrates that we demand a god. Throughout time, man has looked for God. Sometimes we got it wrong, as in ancient mythology, and a couple of times, with the grace of God we got it right as with the Hebrew faith of the Old Testament, and our Catholic faith.

Millions of faithful Catholics have died for their faith and hundreds more die every day, particularly in the Middle East. People don't die for hocus-pocus; a reasonable person would have to conclude that there has to be a greater reason and logically that reason is

God. Scientific evidence abounds with the bodies of Saints that are incorrupt hundreds of years after their deaths, so well preserved that they appear to be sleeping. Eucharistic miracles abound, and then there are the dozens of times Our Lady has appeared and left indisputable evidence of the divine. I have learned that the Magisterium will never insult our intelligence, our reason, but in the end, we must always rely on faith, just like the scientist in the lab

Which brings us to the second topic today, evangelization. We will all have the same issues that Ezekiel and Jesus had when it comes to bringing the faith to the adults, and sometimes to the adolescents in our families. When they don't want to listen, bring them to someone in the church that they are willing to listen to; arguing will just give you a headache.

When someone is presented to you for instruction in the Catholic faith, don't panic! Be grateful, the person seeking instruction and the person bringing them to you both trust and admire you. It is a humbling position to be in. You are expert enough for this, you just have to let the Holy Spirit guide your conversation. Just do your best, apply reason and have faith that God will do the rest.