

6, Easter, A, 2008
St. Mary, Siloam Springs, AR

You've heard the old saying that "actions speak louder than words." I want to share with you an experience in which the truth of that saying came home to me in a forceful and unforgettable way. Back in 2003 I visited Rome and had the very rare privilege of concelebrating Mass with Pope John Paul II in his private chapel early one morning. Most people are thrilled even to get a glimpse of the pope, let alone be 5 feet away as he celebrated Mass. You might recall that in 2003, John Paul was very weak and frail, and most of that Mass he remained seated. But when it came time for the Eucharistic prayer, he did his best to stand, to lift up the chalice and host, to genuflect at the proper time and to bow. You know, I watched with tears in my eyes as he struggled to fulfill the priestly movements of the Mass. If I had been the pope, I probably would have just given myself a dispensation, and stayed seated. But he didn't. At that moment I made a promise never to complain no matter how many Masses I have to say on Sunday, and be careful with the gestures of the Mass. I remember many seminary professors trying to tell us to carefully obey the rules of the Mass, but none had spoken as loudly or convincingly as the pope did that day. Actions do speak louder than words.

In the second reading today, St. Peter urges the early Christians to defend their faith. He says: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do so with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear." St. Peter is saying that we

should always be ready to share and if necessary even defend our Catholic faith. But did you notice how? We are to do so with gentleness, reverence and through our actions. In other words, it's not our clever arguments and passionate tirades that will convince someone about Jesus, but rather our love and our way of life. Our actions will speak much louder than our words.

Every day there are lots of people who talk to us, try to get our attention, or try to sell us something using words. Now, nothing turns me off faster than someone who yells at me, to get my attention, and sell me something. With all due respect to anyone who is a car dealer: those commercials where someone yells about how great their deals are don't work on me; just in case you're wondering. And then there are the phone solicitations: sitting at home, enjoying supper with the family, minding our own business and someone calls trying to sell you another credit card. You know, one of the greatest inventions of the last century was not the internet or the flat screen T.V., it was the answering machine! Such people use lots of words – and sometimes very loud words – to sell things, but there are no actions behind them. Actions always speak louder than mere words.

Folks, we, too, have to be careful not to rely too much on our words; we also must learn to speak with our actions. Here's the advice I give to young girls who wonder if a certain boy likes them. I tell them: Don't pay attention to his words, but rather watch his actions. What do they "tell" you

about him? His actions will speak louder than his words. Married couples need to remember this, too, especially those spouses who suffer from "selective hearing loss." You know, when your spouse only hears those things that he wants to. Recently, I came across this little joke. When a couple first gets married their speaking and listening skills usually evolve over 3 years. In the first year of marriage the man speaks and the woman listens. In the second year of marriage the woman speaks and the man listens. In the third year, they both speak and the neighbors listen. You see, what they need to do is to stop speaking and start acting, letting their love show itself in deeds. I've also been amazed to see what motivates different people to decide to become Catholic. Often it is the example of a Catholic spouse, or the devotion of a Catholic friend, or the humility of a Catholic neighbor. Just like St. Peter said: share the faith not by screaming from the roof-tops or beating people over the head with a Bible, but with gentleness, reverence and the clear conscience that is the fruit of a holy life. It is actions that touch and move people's hearts, while words often don't get past their ears.

I'm not a huge fan of Mary Chapin Carpenter, but I like one song, "Shut up and kiss me." The point is obvious: don't waste time talking, show your love with a kiss. Every Sunday it's time to stop talking about how much we love Jesus, and it's time to show our love in action. Every time I receive Holy Communion, I imagine I give Jesus a holy kiss. Folks, our actions speak louder than our words. What have you been saying to Jesus lately? Praised be Jesus Christ!