

At the Easter Vigil, we read from the Prophet Ezekiel who spoke on behalf of God:

“I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts.”

Throughout the season of Lent, we identified some of the ways our hearts were stony and needed to be touched by the Holy Spirit so that they could be transformed more and more into the image and likeness of Christ.

Throughout the season of Easter, we begin every Mass with the sprinkling of clean water upon us, reminding us of our Baptism when we did receive a new heart: one of flesh – and not of stone.

But unless we exercise these hearts of flesh, they will soon harden and turn back into stone.

And so our need of heart exercises every week, like going about doing very ordinary things, out of love and seeing in those around us the presence of the risen Christ.

Like trying to judge others less and calling upon God to give us the grace we need to be a bit more understanding, accepting and merciful.

Or as I suggest today, feeding the Lord's lambs and tending the Lord's sheep by being good teachers.

In the Acts of the Apostles we hear how the disciples just could not keep quiet about the Good News of Jesus' resurrection – even when the Sanhedrin ordered them to stop speaking, they filled Jerusalem with their teaching!

All of us are called to teach others about Christ in one way or another. Pastors by their preaching. Parents by their words and guidance. Life-long Catholics teach others by their experience, and newly baptized and initiated can teach us seasoned members by their zeal and enthusiasm. And all of us teach most effectively by actions – more than our words.

Teaching, says Sister of Notre Dame, Melanie Svoboda, is a lot like feeding chickens. Having grown up on a farm in Ohio, this is the story she tells: (*Peeling back Eggshells, pg. 8*)

The way I see it, there are three essential elements to proper chicken feeding, just as there are three essential elements to teaching.

First, there is the feed itself – the corn, the mash, whatever. The feed is the gifts we bring to the chickens. More than that, it is their source of nourishment of life itself.

Without too much of a stretch of the imagination, we can say that the chicken feed is the “good news of the gospel” we bring each day to our chickens.

The second element of chicken feeding is the calling of the chickens. We have to get their attention, to alert them to the feed we have for them.

A good chicken feeder goes beyond merely calling the chickens. He or she establishes a relationship with the chickens. The feeder talks to the chickens, perhaps even thanking them for the fine eggs they have been laying— like my mother used to do.

A good chicken feeder (like a good teacher) is always aware of being a receiver as well as a giver.

The third element of chicken feeding (and of teaching) is the actual broadcasting of the feed. How does an experienced chicken feeder broadcast the feed? Eagerly, generously and unsparingly.

What I have described is an image of teaching at its best: good seed, good relationships, generosity.

Teaching at its worst would be the person who sets out to feed the chickens grumbling and mumbling the whole way to the chicken coop.

“I’ve got to feed those stupid chickens – again! And I just fed them yesterday! They’re never satisfied. All they do is eat, eat, eat. What good are they anyway?”

This kind of feeder makes no attempt to establish any kind of relationship with the chickens.

“After all, they’re only chickens!”

And how does such a feeder broadcast the feed? Perhaps sparingly: “A kernel for you, a kernel for you. . . .” Or angrily, throwing handfuls of feed onto the ground in disgust. Or hastily, dumping the whole pail of feed in one spot, just to get the job over with.

Yes, there are two ways to feed chickens. One way has no respect for feed, relationships or process. The other way reverences all three.

So our heart exercise for this week is to simply ask ourselves what type of teacher we think we are: one who has no respect for feed, relationships, or process . . . or of one who reverences these things.

And if we can’t think of anyone who we are a teacher to -- we need to ask ourselves, why not? All of us are teachers in one way or another. And who just need to become aware of who just might be watching us to make a difference in their lives.