

May 7, 2017 Speaking The Truth Homily: Brothers and sisters, in the history of children's literature, there are few stories as entertaining and thought provoking as Hans Christian Anderson's moral tale, "*The Emperor's New Clothes*". In this classic story, the emperor is a vain, self-centered and foolish ruler, who is more concerned about his expansive wardrobe than he is in the welfare of his own subjects. Two disreputable men posing as tailors convince the emperor that that they can weave a garment from a special magic fabric. So resplendent will this garment be that only the ignorant and stupid will fail to see it. As it turns out, even the emperor himself will be deceived. In the story's most memorable scene, the emperor parades through the town in only his polka dot underwear. The ministers of the crown, unwilling to embarrass the emperor, compliment him on his fine garment. Only a child is willing to stand up and tell the truth. He cries, "The emperor has no clothes!" The storyteller has a point to make: people should be willing to speak up if they know the truth, even if they know in their hearts that they may lose the favor of their fellow citizens, and be ridiculed and reviled.

At the end of St. Peter's justly celebrated Pentecost sermon in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, he speaks the truth about Jesus, even though he put his life at risk for his bold words in defense of Christ's resurrection. He was not "politically correct" nor did he care about public opinion. He was not intimidated by the "thought police".

In his remarks, he scolded his fellow Jews for conspiring to have Jesus condemned to death. In speaking in such a direct fashion, he had hoped to awaken in their hearts a sense of guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. And his sharp words stung his hearers. The evangelist informs us that "they were cut to the heart". (Acts 2:37) Their conversion had begun. He challenged his hearers to reassess Jesus of Nazareth, to recognize him as the Messiah (Acts 2:36). He called them to repentance (Acts 2:38), which, in the original Greek, means a change of heart and a change of values. He also made reference to his generation as perverse (Acts 2:40).

Such words are not likely to win many friends! Yet we learn that on that very day of his sermon three thousand souls were baptized (Acts 2:41). The first conversions to the Christian faith clearly demonstrate the effectiveness of the gospel message and the work of the Holy Spirit.

How open are we to constructive criticism? Are we fearful of witnessing to our faith? Does our moral life conform to the teachings of our Catholic faith? The hero of Hans Christian Anderson's tale is a young boy who, in innocence, told the truth. The self-serving flatterers in the emperor's entourage simply could not take that risk. Can we identify with them in their weakness?

Amen!