

My friend Norman Hollander died this past week at the age of 96. He used to play cello with the orchestra in Kansas City, and shortly after I came to Cameron, he played a concert here with me. His funeral is this afternoon, they've asked Alex Shum to play violin for it, and that's why Alex and I have postponed our concert here to May 2. Alex told me, the Kansas City Symphony recently hosted a dinner for its retired members. The conductor, Michael Stern, tried to get Norman to speak out in favor of playing in Kansas City, but it led to some unintended humor. As a younger man, Norman had been the associate cellist for the Cleveland Orchestra. Just as in baseball, no Royals fan likes to admit the Yankees are better; so in classical music, no Kansas City Symphony fan likes to admit the Cleveland Orchestra is better – but it is. Norman left Cleveland because he was offered the job of principal cellist in Kansas City. So, Stern asked Norman, in front of all the other musicians, "Looking back over your career, did you ever regret your decision to come to Kansas City?" Now, Norman never regretted that decision, and Stern was just trying to get an easy endorsement. But he forgot Norman was not just old; he was hard of hearing. So, when Stern asked his question, Norman didn't hear it and stared back at him, as if he were thinking it over. Everyone knew what had happened, so Stern smiled and said to him, "Don't answer. Just don't answer that question."

There are times we get asked to speak out for a decision we have made, a cause we believe in, or a wrong that should be righted. A lot of people don't like standing up in front of others and saying something, especially if it's controversial. But most people find that when you do, it feels good to say in public a belief you hold very deeply in private. Even if this causes you to undergo some embarrassment and ridicule, you feel good about that, too.

You can find good role models with Peter and the apostles in today's first reading. After the resurrection the Holy Spirit had come to them, so they were out in Jerusalem, preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and pointing out injustice: They told people point blank, "You killed Jesus." People knew this was true, and that Jesus was innocent. Even so, authorities arrested the apostles and threw them into prison, but an angel came and set them free. So in today's reading they were back out in the streets doing the same things. Authorities hauled them in again. They didn't bother throwing them into jail – they knew now that doesn't work. So they scolded the apostles. What does Peter do? He starts preaching to them! He starts doing the very thing they've arrested him for doing. So they flog the apostles a bit and send them on their way. None of this deterred them. Instead, we read in Acts, "they left . . . rejoicing that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name."

There will be times when God asks you to stand up and speak out for something you know is right. You may suffer for it. But if it is the right thing to do, you will feel good about what you have said, and feel good about the suffering. Jesus showed this best of all: any cause worth speaking about is worth the suffering and worth the dying. A good cause is more important than the person who speaks about it, and the cause will live on.