

Commentary to the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Fourteenth Sunday: A Prophet Among Them

“You can’t handle the truth,” Jack Nicholson’s character, Colonel Nathan R. Jessep, shouted in court in the 1992 classic movie, *A Few Good Men*. “They can’t handle the truth,” is really what the Spirit is telling Ezekiel in this Sunday’s first reading from the beginning of this prophetic book. But that didn’t stop the fact that they would know there is a prophet among them.

And the people of Nazareth questioned Jesus’ teaching. They didn’t want to handle His Truth, so they formed an ad hominem argument. An ad hominem argument is the weakest, argument possible. It is an attack on the person not on the question presented. “So,” the people in today’s Gospel asked, “Why should we listen to Jesus’ teaching. How could he have anything significant to say to us? We know him, his family, his home.” Politicians do this all the time. They don’t like their opponents stance but can’t prove it wrong, so they attack their opponents background, character, etc. We do this all the time. We hear our parents, or our children, or our neighbors say something that we really don’t want to hear because we know it is right, so we discredit the argument by attacking the person making it. So a Teen comes back from a deep spiritual experience, and is committed to following and proclaiming Christ. He or she says to his or her Mom or Dad, “I love you. And because I love you I have to tell you that you need to be joining us in Church every week and receive communion.” And the parent responds, “Who are you to tell me what to do? You’re only 16.” How does a Teen being 16 change the facts?

Ad hominem arguments are pathetic.

C. S. Lewis wrote that we live in a society that has replaced “I believe,” with “I feel.” We live in a society where personal values has replaced objective morality. When a prophet comes, a prophet being someone who proclaims the truth, society looks to discredit the prophet. We should realize that if Jesus Christ were walking the earth right now, once more teaching in the synagogues as well as in His own churches, He would be crucified again, most likely through slander, but possibly even with nails. Let’s face it, the leaders of the Temple had Jesus crucified because it kept them from running around with their hands to their ears and screaming, “La la la la la,” so they did not have to hear what He was saying.

Many people in our society would rather that Christ stayed in the tomb than have to listen to His confronting them with the Truth.

All this leaves us with two questions: First, do I have the humility to handle the truth? And second: do I have the courage to proclaim the truth?

First question, do I have the humility to handle the truth? Objective morality tells us that we are not the creators and arbiters of Truth. Truth is not what we say it is. Two plus two is going to be four, no matter what we feel it could be. It takes humility for us to agree that some matters are right or wrong regardless of our feelings. For example, some people feel they have a right to steal from work because they put in extra hours. The humble person would say, “God’s law, the moral law is quite clear. It is a sin to steal. Theft is theft. End of story.” Many people say that it is OK to have sex outside of marriage, be it infidelity or any form of pre-marital sex, because it feels right. The humble person would say, “Right is right and wrong is wrong, no matter how I feel.” It takes humility to realize that there is a Higher Authority that keeps us from justifying anything, rationalizing our way to agreeing to anything. It takes humility to be a person of faith, a person who lives his or her faith. It takes humility for a person to say, “As much as everything within me wants to do this, it is as wrong for me as it is for anyone else.” It takes humility to handle the truth.

Second question: do I have the courage to proclaim the truth? The proclamation of the truth demands tremendous courage. Proclaiming the truth means being crucified, figuratively and literally. So you say to others something like, “It is wrong to get drunk, whether you are driving or not. It is just worst to be drunk and driving.” That will get you insults from your so-called friends. That will result in your being left off the list of those who are invited to a party. And that will have you pigeon-holed as a religious fanatic. It takes tremendous courage to accept the cross.

We need to remind ourselves, Jesus Christ is Truth Incarnate. Those who reject the truth, reject Him. But those who have the courage to proclaim His Truth, proclaim Jesus Christ.

Back to Ezekiel. The prophet is told, “You shall say to them, ‘thus says the Lord God.’ And whether they heed or resist, for they are a rebellious people, they shall know that a prophet has been among them.” People may attack the proclamation of the truth. Certainly many will. People may attack the one proclaiming the truth. That is the behavior of those with an infantile view of life. But nothing can diminish the force of the truth. And in time, perhaps over centuries, people will realize that there was a prophet among them.

That prophet is the Lord Jesus Christ, whose Truth we have been called to proclaim.

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