

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Aug 27th 2014

Which Side Are You On?

“You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones.” (Matthew 23:27)

To follow Jesus, we leave old ways behind. As all things are made new, one can grow dizzy. Paul emphasizes the steadying role of tradition as the Christian movement spread through the empire. Everyone must contribute to the work of community in some way. No one lives off the labor of others. We share the risks and joys and troubles. Those with authority must serve.

The other path is more common. Like scribes and Pharisees, we acquire the shiny regalia of virtue designed to impress. Those with authority hobnob with the privileged and pray vaguely for the poor. When strong words and courageous actions are needed, the silence is deafening. Jesus calls these dead men. Their words are formed from bone and ash. Their masks will fall some day. Truth cannot be hidden for long.

The prophetic voice unsettles us. From Creighton University in the 1940's, the Jesuit Father John Markoe attacked racism as a mortal sin. While most white Americans, including Catholics, saw segregation as normal and necessary, an interracial band of young people answered Markoe’s call. Years before the courts struck down Jim Crow laws, the DePorres Club used persuasion and protest to challenge local churches, schools, hospitals, and business to do the right thing and end racial segregation. (See Ahead of Their Time by Matt Holland).

Today we remember St. Monica, whose trust in God carried her through many storms. Daily prayer frees us to take up the works of justice and mercy as the stuff of life. Every morning we awaken to a call. Which side am I on?

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