

Connect!

Uniting Word & World



Sunday, February 1, 2015

Discerning the Voice of Truth

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/020115.cfm>

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Mark 1:21-28



I have to admit that I am finding it harder and harder to pay attention to current events. The issues facing the world are increasingly complex. From global terrorism to world financial markets, every “expert” has a different opinion on what is happening and why. Is the [planet really getting warmer](#) and are we to blame? Do [tax increases](#) create more opportunities for lower income people or do they only [divert money into government programs](#) that would be better invested in the private sector to create jobs? Is global terrorism [a result of religious fervor](#) or [blowback for](#)

[Western interventions](#) in the Middle East?

While the Internet offers us more information, it cannot interpret data for us. Most news shows, aware of our ever dwindling attention span, run short clips of stories with plenty of footage and graphics but little context or analysis. When they do get around to treating issues in more depth, they usually feature two speakers at opposite ends of the spectrum, raising their voices and interrupting each other. As we become aware of biases in different media outlets, we can suspect that stories are being spun to favor a certain point of view. For all these reasons, the public opinion of our news media is as low as it has ever been.

I can sympathize, then, with the amazement the people experience in this Sunday's Gospel when they hear Jesus speak with authority. Jesus satisfies their longing for truth. He speaks with clarity a message that both comforts and challenges them. And Jesus backs up that teaching with a display of his power over demons. Don't we also need people with moral authority to speak with courage and clarity about the issues we are struggling with as a global community in our day?

The first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy addresses a problem the people of Israel would face after Moses' death. Who would speak with God's authority now? How can we tell a true prophet of the Lord from a false one? Throughout Israel's history, this question would vex king, priest, and layperson because the stakes were high. Listening to true prophets lead to reconciliation with God, peace, and prosperity. Trusting false prophets lead to persecution, war, and exile. Whom do we believe? Whom do we follow?

As Christians, we have a tradition to rely on that can help us discern the voice of truth from the cacophony of opinions, spin, and propaganda. While it does not provide certain answers to every question, it can help us to form our consciences so that we are better able to see the path to follow when the smoke of disinformation gets thick.

The central truth of that tradition that should guide our analysis of the news is the dignity of each and every human life. The only reason to call into question the dignity, personhood, or quality of a human life is as a pretext to marginalize people, deprive them of their rights, and, ultimately, kill them. Even when it is disguised as an act of compassion, we should reject efforts to kill the sick, elderly, and mentally ill. Even when the possibility of finding cures for diseases is touted, we should reject the idea that life in its earliest stages can be manipulated and experimented on. Even when we are told that they are taking jobs away from others, we should reject any measures to marginalize immigrants or separate them from their families. On the contrary, any voice that affirms the dignity of each and every person is an echo of the word of the Creator who called the creature made in his image and likeness "very good."

As consumers, we ultimately get the kind of news media we deserve. If we are more interested in the weather than in government corruption, media outlets will invest more in meteorologists than in investigative journalists. We have to take more responsibility about what we choose to watch, and demand from publishers and broadcasters a higher level of professionalism and integrity. At the same time, we must speak with authority, clarity, and courage about what really matters—that every human life is valued and protected.

Douglas Sousa, STL

PRAYER

Almighty God,

Strengthen and direct, we pray,
the will of all whose work it is to write what many read,
and to speak where many listen.

May we be bold to confront evil and injustice:
understanding and compassionate of human weakness;
rejecting alike the half-truth which deceives,
and the slanted word which corrupts.

May the power which is ours, for good or ill,
always be used with honesty and courage,
with respect and integrity,
so that when all here has been written, said and done,

we may, unashamed, meet Thee face to face.
Amen.

—*A Prayer for Journalists, St. Francis de Sales*

NOTICES

POPE'S MESSAGE FOR WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

Pope Francis' message for the 49th World Communications Day, "Communicating the Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter with the Gift of Love," was released on January 23, the vigil of the memorial of St. Francis of Sales, patron saint of communicators. The full text of the message can be viewed at:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20150123_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html.

2015 CATHOLIC SOCIAL MINISTRY GATHERING

The annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering is organized by the USCCB's Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development in collaboration with four other USCCB departments and sixteen national Catholic organizations. The 2015 Gathering will take place from Saturday, February 7 to Tuesday, February 10, 2015, in Washington DC to explore the theme of To Go Forth: Encountering Christ in the Heart of the World. To register, visit

<http://www.cvent.com/events/to-go-forth-encountering-christ-in-the-heart-of-the-world/event-summary-45867e9fce7444f9af42ed2b5d050392.aspx>.

SOLIDARITY FUND FOR THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

The Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa, which has no set national date, gives much needed aid to the Church in Africa while expressing the gratitude of the Church in the United States for the warm and generous assistance of the African priests and sisters in our parishes. The USCCB has resources available for this national collection on its website at

<http://www.usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/solidarity-fund-for-africa/collection/index.cfm>.

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