

26A SML 2020
MT 21:28-32

The flipside of lying and the lack of integrity in the spoken word is Truth and integrity in the Eternal Word who is Jesus Christ.

This evening's/morning's gospel confronts the age old sin of lying, the lack of integrity in the spoken word. Every businessman, every homeowner, anyone who has been burned, knows to get it in writing; make sure you document everything, because people put little integrity in the spoken word and people lie.

This is nothing new. The very first lie told by a human being is recorded in the 4th Chapter of Genesis:

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out into the field." When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

Lying comes in many forms and colors. The favorite lie is the white lie. There seems to be a double standard when it comes to lying. As did your parents, my parents told me about the boy who cried wolf. After I first lied to my parents, they told me that since I lied to them, I would have to earn their trust again

because once you lie, you can never be trusted. When I was 12, my Mother also told me at the movies, when I got up to the ticket window, tell the lady that I was 10. I forget the movie I saw that day, but I will never forget that my Mother told me to lie.

Most of us have been taught then, that morality depends not on whether an action is good or bad, but on whether or not you get caught. That morality is not morality at all. It's the principle of proportionalism, which says an action is determined moral if the good results outweigh the bad results. What I learned at the movies at 12 years of age is saving money is a greater good than telling the truth. I also learned how to explain away a lie. "Their tickets are much too expensive anyway."

Proportionalism, which says an action is determined moral if the good results outweigh the bad results, leaves no room for objective truth.

Whether in Corporate America or within Holy Mother Church, we all live in a real life Peyton Place. Life is not black and white. Life is grey. When I was on my leave of absence from the active priesthood, I had a co-worker in middle management who knew I was a priest. And because he knew I

was a priest, he and I talked about a lot about life. We talked about my priesthood and my depression. He spoke about his marriage and the most articulate argument why he and another manager, who was also married with children, were having an affair.

I told him, "Well that explains one thing." "What's that?" he asked. "It explains why you look like hell. You are living a double life. You are putting so much energy into covering every move you make so as not to get caught. The double life you lead is eating you alive." But proportionalism would say having an extra-marital affair is moral because the intimacy needs of the adulterous couple are being met, which is more important than being faithful to his wife and his children.

If you subscribe to proportionalism, you can expect two things: moral chaos and no accountability: moral chaos because there will be no objectivity in what is right and what is wrong, and no accountability, because the morality of an action will depend on the one making the decision, not the objective basis of the moral order.

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Truth and the Eternal Word are one in the same: Jesus Christ. For Jesus said “I am the Truth,” and John 1:1 said, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Jesus is Truth and Jesus is the Word. Jesus’ morality is based on two very basic and very simple principles:

1. the first is based on **reason**: Do good. Avoid evil.
2. the second is based on **morality**: You can never do an evil to achieve a good.

The eighth chapter of John’s Gospel would make very useful reading for my co-manager in Corporate America: the story of the woman caught in adultery. The woman was not a prostitute. The woman was someone’s wife. And her lover was someone’s husband. Since the penalty for adultery is death by stoning, for the woman to risk her life to have an affair, the woman was desperate. It was so obvious it was not worth discussing, because after the scribes and the Pharisees left Jesus alone with the woman, they did not discuss her marriage and her reasons for cheating on her husband because they both knew the reasons, but the reasons would never make an evil action moral. And in one line, Jesus applied **reason and**

morality to her situation. “Go, and from now on, avoid this sin.” In other words, “Ma’am, you will leave me with your intimacy needs still unmet, but you need to seek another solution: work on your marriage with your husband, tolerate him, and if neither of those are an option, divorce him, but adultery is not an option.” And that is hard. It is very hard to live a life without intimacy.

The woman was desperate and desperate people to desperate things. Many of the clients that our SVDP Society ministers to are desperate. They literally live hand to mouth. What they make that day they spend to feed their family that night. What a comfort our SVDP is to them to know they will be helped, and this help has been provided by our SVDP for 40 years.

When I arrived at my last parish, St. Benedict in Holmdel, there was no SVPD so starting one happened the first Lent I was there. And it was a member from our conference, Nancy Sanson, who accompanied Marge McGinley to St. Benedict to help organize and train our novice Vincentians.

You might think life would be quite easy if you never knew Jesus. Life would also be quite empty. St. Augustine and Venerable Charles de Foucauld testify to this. Charles wrote,

“For 12 years I denied nothing, but believed nothing. I lived as one can when the last spark of faith has gone out.”

A Fulton Sheen quote that I’ve spoken often. “A lie is still a lie even if everybody is telling it. And the truth is still the truth even if no one believes it.”

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