

14 March 2021

Writings: Living In The Light

Jesus said, "For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed" (John 3:20).

Shortly before I was ordained a Priest, an uncle gave me a piece of advice I have never forgotten. He said the most valuable thing any professional person has is their reputation. Be transparent with people. Instead of telling them what they want to hear or will make you look good, be honest even when it makes you or them uncomfortable. Whenever you make a promise, keep it; even if later you wish you had not made it. Play by the rules, even when people pressure you to look the other way and do something morally questionable. Although doing things this way will often cost you in the short run, over time you will develop a reputation as someone who can be trusted and that will bring great benefits. After over thirty years in the Priesthood, I have to say my uncle was a wise man.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus about how to tell the difference between those who seek the truth and those who hide behind falsehoods. It is only the latter group who will come to know God and gain eternal life.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, leader of the Jews and interested in learning more about Jesus. He immediately recognizes Jesus as a teacher of the Law who comes from God and whose miracles (called signs in John's Gospel) demonstrate his connection with the Divine. Yet, he also has limited understanding because when Jesus says he must be born "from above" or "born again" (depending on the Bible translation) Nicodemus takes those words literally and asks if someone can re-enter a mother's womb. Jesus tries to clear up the confusion by being transparent about his mission: he came to earth from heaven in order to be lifted up (crucified) so that people could gain eternal life. He then makes the promise he came not to condemn the world but to save it. Finally, he indicates those believe in him will not be condemned and will demonstrate their faith through their actions by living in the light (truth) revealed by Jesus. Those who reject him will be condemned and show their rejection through their deeds concealed by the darkness of ignorance and sin. The reputation of both groups will become obvious to all.

Long before the arrival of the Covid 19 pandemic, many people were torn between living in the light and darkness. While most aspired to be transparent with others, keep their promises and play by the rules, such factors as the desire to get ahead, avoid embarrassing situations or follow the example of others alters their behaviour. High standards are nice but not possible in the real world. The pandemic has highlighted examples of such behaviour with leaders hiding bad news from the public for political or commercial reasons, rich countries promising to help developing nations obtain vaccines but delaying deliveries until after all their citizens have received their shots, individuals using whatever means necessary to receive their vaccination ahead of their place in line. Those living in the light may wonder 'what is the point of doing so'.

Yet, short term gain may not be the best measurement for such behaviour. The decision to ignore the rules against unnecessary foreign travel have cost several Canadian leaders their jobs and damaged their reputations. It is a good bet most of us who are being transparent with others by keeping our promise to work for the common good and play by the rules are still doing well. Those of us who are publicly showing we support efforts to stop the spread of Covid by wearing our masks, honouring our promises to look in on our vulnerable neighbours and waiting patiently in line for our injection can wake up every morning, look in the mirror and like the person we see. Since we have nothing to hide, we have nothing to fear. Isn't that a good way to start the day? Living in the light does have its advantages.

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