

Pastor's Pen: Keeping Faith in a Time of Crisis

In the Gospel of Matthew 14:22-33, we hear the story of Jesus walking on the water. He had fed the five thousand and sent his apostles out ahead of Him as He prayed alone. By the time He was done, the boat was already several hundred yards from shore being tossed about by the waves and a strong wind. Jesus walks out to the apostles. The apostles think they are seeing a ghost. Jesus assures them it is Him. Peter, in a fit of faith, answers Jesus's call to get out of the boat and walk to Him on the water. It is worth noting that Jesus does not still the waves or the wind. Peter is to get out despite these things. For a bit, Peter does walk on the water. However, as soon as Peter starts to notice the wind and waves, he sinks, and calls out for rescue. Jesus does so. He then chastises Peter for his lack of faith.

We live in stormy times. As Americans, so much in our culture and body politic seems ensconced in drama, conflicting accounts, and a tyranny of opinion constantly treated as fact. For us as American Catholics, we find ourselves embattled with scandal, accusations of depraved behavior by those who say they represent God, conflicting accounts, and an assault on church teaching from those within the church itself. In either case, a dangerous cynicism can develop; a dangerous cynicism born of weariness and frustration. It can result in walking away, or worse yet, demanding destruction on the aforementioned institutions. These feelings are understandable. They do not help us address what is going on or how to remedy these diseases.

Keeping faith in a time of crisis is much like Peter getting out of the boat and walking on water in the midst of the wind and the waves. How do we do this? The answer is easy to write but hard to practice. We do this by keeping our eyes fixed on Christ. I would imagine Peter walked on water as long as he kept his attention on Christ. It was only when his focus moved to the wind and waves that he started to sink. So, how in the midst of such grief and anger do we keep ourselves fixed on Christ?

Follow the Truth Wherever it Leads

Jesus, in John 14:6, says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." In John 18:37, as Jesus is being interrogated by Pilate says, "The reason I came into the world is to testify to the truth. Anyone committed to truth hears my voice." Our only sane choice in the midst of such turbulent seas is to seek the truth. Notice I say THE truth. The truth is hard to discern when there is so much out there that is not true because of sloppy reporting, agenda-induced spin, or outright lies.

Too many times, the truth gets obscured by two camps: those who try to dissuade people from looking for truth and those who want to hijack a tragedy to push an agenda. The one side will act as if the cause of consternation is really nothing much and doesn't merit attention. Too often this side is interested in keeping a status quo or covering up nefarious behavior. Sometimes this side is deeply ashamed of the activity and looks to solve it by hoping it goes away on its own. The other side wants to hijack the situation to gain ground on an agenda. For them an accusation equals certain guilt. This is born of a deep frustration with perceived abuses and even real abuses. Their answer to everything sounds much like Robespierre, the leader of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. The great caution to such a mentality lies in the story of Robespierre himself: live by the guillotine, die by the guillotine. Neither cover-ups nor rushes to judgment serve to find the truth.

Truth will always find itself in love. Love seeks to heal wounds, not to exploit them. Love acknowledges that damage has happened and seeks to bring healing. Love does not allow for harm to be ignored. Love is not tied to worldly agendas, does not seek to retain or hold earthly power, and does not bend the truth to maintain power. As love seeks the good of the other, it neither condones nor rewards sinful behavior, nor does it place even the most grievous sinner as beyond redemption. Love pursues the truth in all things. It rejoices in the truth. Love points beyond personal agendas, regardless of how noble that agenda may seem, and seeks to draw us into union so that each person may be a positive answer to Jesus's prayer that we may be one as He and the Father are one. Truth and love will always be found in union.

The search for truth and its loving application so as to heal the Body of Christ must be paramount in how we go forward in addressing the issues at hand.

Navigating Between Scylla and Charybdis

In Greek mythology, there were two monsters who were positioned at a narrow strait in the sea. The two monsters were Scylla and Charybdis. If a sailor navigated too far in one direction, Scylla destroyed the ship. If they went too far in the other direction, Charybdis destroyed them. The Catholic Church finds itself constantly between these two; between fear and pride. We can grow fearful over scandals we see and, like Peter, sink. If we are catering to fear or inspiring fear, we are diverging from the truth. Truth, however ugly it might be, must be known so that proper remedies can be given.

We can also grow proud or arrogant. Arrogance leads to wrath. We can be like Judas and walk away from Christ seeking reward elsewhere. If we are using this crisis to push an agenda, then we are diverging from truth as well. We must do what is necessary to avoid these two monsters.

The light of truth is a great disinfectant. We must not fear it. We must not obscure it with introducing a different type of darkness. It will take patience, cooperation, courage, and transparency. I know there are many accusations and counter accusations being made which lead all the way to the Pope himself. If these accusations are not true, then people have a right to their good name. If they are true, then proper remedies, even resignation of some very powerful figures, might well be appropriate. If we go into a search for the truth with a predetermined outcome, then it is not truth we are looking for, but supporting facts to uphold an agenda.

We do well to pray for all parties involved. It is well that we pray for the truth to come out. It is well to pray for healing. We must do all we can to reach out to victims of these crimes. We must, in the midst of these waves and headwinds, keep our eyes fixed on Christ. If we want lasting remedies to these scandals, then truth will be the only venue we can take to get there.