

THE NEED TO RECLAIM AND LIVE WITH MORAL COURAGE

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Recently, I heard that the word most frequently looked up in Webster's Dictionary in the past year was "integrity." This may reflect a concern people have about today's media reports. When you turn on TV to watch the evening news or read the daily paper, the headlines make one wonder whatever happened to integrity and moral courage.

In the recent past, I was pleasantly surprised to read about a program started by Case High School students in Racine, Wisconsin, who initiated and lead a program called "Respect."

They address the violent and abusive language often used by students among each other in our schools. They are already feeling a positive effect from their efforts. It was a refreshing change from stories of abuse of every kind that relate to business, government, politics and economics and church as well. Often the most published stories are those about youth violence and not about good things that young people are accomplishing. How can we reclaim our moral courage and address these issues and bring about needed change?

For too long, we have separated ethics and moral codes from every aspect of our lives. They are frequently missing in families, in schools, even in church and other areas. When we separate moral codes from daily living, they no longer influence the choices we make.

We need to restore a moral vision in board room, in classroom, in the halls of government, in corporate offices and church gatherings and wherever people gather and make decisions that affect the lives of other people. This will call people to be caring, concerned, compassionate and just remind us that every choice we make has social and moral consequences. As we share that vision and grow in moral courage, we can learn how to challenge our reliance on military and nuclear power, on a sense of white power and privilege, our sense of empire as a nation, and our addiction to a very comfortable standard of living as well our great desire for independence apart from the common good.

We can all start to re-imagine life as God intended it to be, that is life without white power and privilege, and life lived with moral courage in all

aspects, including corporate and social settings and see life as a journey toward wholeness and integrity and not as a journey through life for our personal gain. This reminds me of time I spent in India at a U.N. Development Conference to consider the needs of the poorest around the world. The first thing we learned as to greet each person with the word “Namaste” which means: “I honor you for your innate goodness and for the divine spark within you and for the potential you have.”

No matter what you see on the outside, each person has goodness within. From this foundation of respect, moral codes, truth telling, integrity and moral empowerment could be learned and advanced in daily life. Moral courage takes practice every day, in the written and spoken words we use and in pulpit preaching. This does take courage to be consistent in speaking and living the truth. Often we are reminded in Scripture: “Do not be afraid.” This is an invitation to step up and out without fear, relying on God’s promise to never let us walk alone.

If we boldly and consistently speak for love and justice, and challenge systems and structures that dehumanize, we can be assured that we will encounter misunderstanding, abuse and ridicule. Preparing to reclaim our moral courage and to speak out boldly can be done in a variety of ways. Small faith groups, training of youth, listening respectfully to both sides of an issue and grounding our ministry in prayer and contemplation can give us the strength and courage to make bold moral choices that will change ourselves and our culture. We will learn to redefine success and good living in today’s world. Hopefully, children and youth will then catch these values in their adult lives. Some people are asking, “Why do we hear so little about justice issues in pulpit preaching?” This calls for more than moralizing. It is a call to look at the causes of injustice and address them in light of our faith.

To accomplish this, we need to be deeply and firmly rooted in the Word of God who partners with us in all our ministries and involvements. Like the prophets of old, we are called to be articulators of God’s vision for our world and to be partners with God in making it a reality in our time and place. This will take more than politics, more than military might or nuclear power. It will take a renewed partnership with our God and a reclaiming and proclaiming of God’s power in every area of our lives.

Moral courage can be taught and learned. Its presence or absence sheds lights on many of the world’s successes or failures, tragedies or triumphs,

down through the years and in our present age. Now is the time to reclaim and live with moral courage so that we and our descendants may have life, hope and meaning for generations yet to come.

Let us begin today with courage and hope. We can do this with confidence knowing that “neither death nor life, principalities or powers, not things past or things to come can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”