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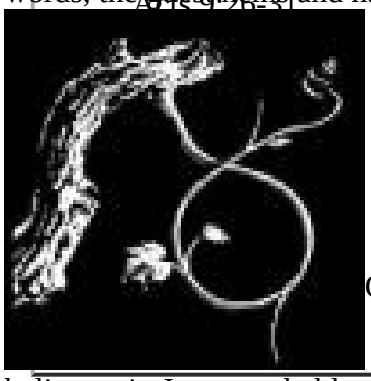
Integrity

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | May. 6, 2012

You may have seen ?Keeping Them Honest,? a regular segment on CNN hosted by Anderson Cooper. From Jan. 1 to Oct. 14, 2011, Cooper?s program included 164 of these reports, 80 of which focused on political issues involving the two main parties and their candidates in the United States. The remainder of the segments included such topics as the Middle East, Libya, Syria, Egypt, some domestic stories (like the Casey Anthony trial) and natural and manmade disasters.

During each segment, Cooper interviews an invited guest and questions them about their positions on certain issues, their beliefs, values and goals. Then, like an external conscience, Cooper reads or replays a past interview in which the person seems to directly contradict their present responses. Skewered by their own words, the guest hems and haws in an effort to clarify their position and save face.

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 9:26-31



Cooper holds powerful figures accountable for their words and actions. Meanwhile, believers in Jesus are held to an even higher standard of integrity. That standard is given voice by the Johannine church in today?s second reading: ?Let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.? Believers are to surrender themselves to the light of God?s truth. In that light, we are challenged to integrate our words with our deeds and beliefs with our actions. This challenge is an exceedingly difficult one. Vast numbers of us say one thing and do another, or promise or intend something but do not follow through. We are too often a people of mixed messages whose words ring hollow because they are contradicted by our works.

Unfortunately, the price of integrity is often dear. Alistair Begg, Scottish-born evangelical pastor and host of the ?Truth for Life? radio series, once said, ?We need more men like Margaret Thatcher! What brought her meteoric rise? She was a politician of conviction! What brought her fall? The same thing.? Similar courage and conviction brought down Sir Thomas More, Thatcher?s fellow countryman of centuries ago. When Henry VIII set aside Catherine of Aragon to marry Anne Boleyn, More, who served as the king?s lord chancellor, refused to condone the action. More also refused to accept the king as the ?supreme head of the Church of England.? For this, he was imprisoned, tried for treason, convicted on perjured testimony and beheaded.

Through the centuries, countless other women, men and children have suffered deprivation, humiliation, torture and even death rather than sacrifice their integrity in any way. We call them martyrs and we admire them. The quality of their character may seem out of reach for most of us. But the Gospel challenge to love in word and deed and truth has not been directed toward a few; it is for all of us.

The challenges of integrity lie within our grasp, for we are not alone or unaided in our efforts. We are not solitary reeds blowing in the wind; rather, we are united to Jesus as branches are to a vine (Gospel). In that capacity, we are assured of the ever-renewable resource of God?s grace, which enables not only our survival but also our productivity and creativity.

Our Hebrew ancestors understood themselves to be the vine that God planted in order to bear good fruit (Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80). Christians similarly understood themselves to be God?s vine, albeit as branches grafted onto the one vine of Christ. Paul, whose efforts are featured in the first reading from Acts, was convinced that gentiles are also grafted by God into the living vine of Jesus Christ. Through our connection to Christ and to one another, and by grace, we grow into whole and holy persons. Therefore, insists William J. Bausch, we cannot chop up our lives into little compartments, separating beliefs from actions or churchgoing from church-living (*Once Upon a Gospel*, Twenty-Third Publications, 2008). Nor can believers bound to the one vine separate their lives from the lives of others. We are a living entity, a complementary organism, and by virtue of our union, we are responsible for one another. This will require that we agree to keep one another honest -- not in the manner of Cooper?s television segment, but as brothers and sisters who care enough to be true to Christ, true to ourselves and true to one another.

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