

I can still recall my very first lie as if it had happened yesterday. I'll spare you the details but suffice it to say it had something to do with being scolded, after which I stuck my tongue out at my mother in an act of defiance when I thought she was not looking. Not privy to the fact that that Mom's have eyes in the back of their heads, she inquired if I had in fact done what she thought she had just seen. "No," came the sheepish response, obviously not at all convincing.

Nobody trusts a liar, nor do hypocrites deserve our respect. While there are many reasons for this, I think the most central one centers around our innate sense of justice. Deep from within, we know these actions to be wrong, most especially when we ourselves commit them. We never feel good after being dishonest, and we loathe to be considered a hypocrite.

Today's Gospel is blunt, reminding us in harsh but necessary terms that from within ourselves, from our hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, deceit, arrogance and many other vices. But what is meant by this "within," and how are we to see it? During his years of searching for the Lord, St. Augustine had many questions, but few answers. He wrote about that period in his life: "I sought whence evil comes and there was no solution."¹ Finally, on that day in the Garden when he heard a voice in the garden, inviting him to take up and read, he found his answer.

He opened the Bible and it fell upon the Letter to the Romans : *Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.*² In that moment, the word was planted in his heart. It also has been planted in us, and is what is able to save our souls. But if we do not cultivate the word, it will dry up in us.

When the Word dries up in us, while we may go through the motions, even appearing to be spiritually vibrant on the outside, we are empty and

¹ St. Augustine, *Conf.* 7,7,11: PL 32,739.

² Letter to the Romans 13:13-14

lifeless on the inside. One week removed from the stinging allegations of the former Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, we are in uncharted waters and many feel utterly deflated and lifeless as Catholics. Do not even think about apologizing for feeling as such- it is righteous anger.

But this does not mean that we remain paralyzed in this moment. Our job is actually rather simple. Keep speaking, keep asking questions, and continue to doggedly pursue the truth. The wheels of justice take time and a full accounting precludes any rush to judgment. Nor is this a time to take sides, expect if by that, you seek to be on the side of truth.

Jesus has harsh words for hypocrites today- he always did. Our response in the face of this begins always with an honest look in the mirror. We face our own vices head on, asking God's pardon. But we also are called to remain steadfast in calling others to greater transparency and truth.

T.S. Eliot's 1930 poem "*Ash Wednesday*" shows his struggles with the faith, a man searching for hope, and one who acknowledges the emptiness of worldly aspirations and ambitions. The poem speaks of the need to "turn again," that primordial theme of Lent, our call to conversion. It is a call to turn away from what is transitory and towards eternity. It is not a one-time exercise, but must be repeated again and again.

It is also an apt metaphor today for our deeply wounded Church. We must pray for genuine conversion, a collective turning away from sin, deceit, lust for power, so that we may seek only God, and Him alone. The search for truth must remain above all a search for God in the midst of strife, a search for peaceful waters amidst the storms of life, a search for strength when our arms are wearied from the fight. The waves etched into the walls symbolize our seeking refuge from the crashing waves on all sides, through the grace of the sacraments the Church provides.

I close with a strophe from Part I of Eliot's poem:

And pray to God to have mercy upon us
And I pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain

Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again
May the judgement not be too heavy upon us