

BAD FAITH

September 27, 2020

Proper 21A

First Reading ~ *Matthew 21:23-32*

Jesus entered the temple precincts and began teaching. The chief priests and the elders of the people came to him and said, “By what authority are you doing what you do? Who gave you this authority?”

“And I,” replied Jesus, “will ask you a single question; if you give me the answer, I will tell you my authority for these actions. What was the origin of John’s right to baptize? Was it divine or was it human?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say ‘divine,’ he will respond, ‘Then why did you refuse to believe in him?’ But if we say ‘human,’ we have the people to fear, for they regard John as a prophet.” So they replied to Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said in reply, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

Jesus continued, “What do you think? There was a landowner who had two children. The landowner approached the elder and said, ‘My child, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ This first child replied, “No, I won’t,” but afterwards had a change of mind and went. The landowner then came to the second child and said the same thing. The second child said in reply, “I’m on my way,” but never went. Which of the two did what was wanted?

They said, “The first.”

Jesus said to them, “The truth is, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the dominion of God before you. When John came walking on the road of justice, you didn’t believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you didn’t change your mind and believe.”

Second Reading ~ *adapted from Julius Bailey in “Racism, Hypocrisy, and Bad Faith: A Moral Challenge to the America I Love”*

The current political environment has signaled the triumph of hypocrisy over integrity— of judging others by their worst examples while judging ourselves by our best intentions. Bad-faith arguments have poisoned the well of civic discourse. Flagrant corruption and nepotism have shifted the goalposts of the acceptable so far that we are no longer on a recognizable playing field.

Bad faith is best understood as a form of hypocrisy, or as an absence of integrity. Whereas an individual who demonstrates integrity does so by acting according to their principles, an individual who demonstrates hypocrisy acts in a way that contradicts or undermines their principles. Bad faith does not limit but rather enables the individual to act in ways in which a person of integrity would not. Moreover, deception is most successful when it is carried out with the appearance of conviction; and what better way to appear convinced of something than to convince oneself?

Third Reading ~ *adapted from A.J. Swoboda in “Messy”*

When we see a problem, we recognize it. Then, after a long time of inaction, it turns into something very dangerous, very evil, very destructive. We call it cynicism. But before it was cynicism, it was revelation. It was prophesy. It was seeing something God was saying. Cynicism is fermented revelation gone bad. We get cynical because other people aren't doing the things to help that we ourselves know we are supposed to do. The problem is that cynics don't change the world. They just make it more miserable.