

“Hope for Our Nation”

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How can one find an encouraging word on a holiday week-end when our nation is experiencing a crisis of confidence in government and an assault upon truth itself? Someone has said that we are like Sunnis and Shiites, mortal enemies, rather than Republicans and Democrats, friends agreeing on goals but differing as to the means to achieve them.

“What we are experiencing is an assault on the very foundations of our society and democracy – the twin pillars of truth and trust.” (Dov Seldman, author of the book “How” and CEO of LRN, which helps companies and leaders build ethical cultures). We used to say “We the People,” Americans who together had a relationship with ideals that were greater than us and with truths that we agreed were so self-evident they would be the fundamental foundation of our shared journey toward a more perfect union -- and of respectful disagreement along the way. Now we are no longer “we the people,” because we no longer share basis truths. We have experienced breakdowns in truth and trust before in our history, but this time there is a particular danger because of technology and failed political leadership in telling the truth. There is no legitimate authority and no unifying basis for our continued association. (Taken from Thomas Friedman’s New York Times column, entitled: Where did ‘We the People’ Go?)

Bleak words, indeed! How can our faith find encouragement in the face of these dire predictions? Consider two realities: this week’s calendar of the saints and today’s Scriptures.

Today is the feast of St. Junipero Serra, Franciscan missionary to our southwest, who gave his life for the sake of evangelization. Monday is the feast of the Apostle Thomas, who abandoned his troubled doubts and gave his life for “My Lord and my God.” On Wednesday, two saints are honored: Anthony Zacharia, priest and founder of the Barnabite missionary order committed to the reform of society; and Elizabeth of Portugal, queen and mother, lover of the poor, peacemaker in the royal family, patroness of Catholic Charities, devoted to caring for the needy. Finally, Friday is the feast of Maria Goretti, teen-aged twentieth-century heroine of chastity, martyred for her convictions. St. Maria was canonized in 1950. Her mother and her assassin who repented took part in the ceremony.

What does this roster say to us today? As in past troubled times, new leaders can come out of nowhere. New leaders can build moral authority in their respectful realms and then use that authority to accomplish needed goals: running for political office; starting a company; opening a school; leading a movement or building a community organization.

The cure for our troubled society lies right here and in faith communities throughout our nation.

Consider today's Scriptures. A woman of influence provides hospitality for the prophetic Elisha and is rewarded for her generosity (2 Kings 4). A year later, her baby son is born. It may be farfetched, but think of the consequences today if admirable prophetic leaders in our time were supported in their mission to reform society. Unforeseen blessings could await us.

St. Paul reminds us of the consequences of our baptism. We are meant to live a new life, so much so that our baptism changes everything. We are capable of dying to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

The gospel antiphon declares: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation; announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

The gospel comes from the Mission Discourse of Jesus, reminding his disciples of the cost of following him (Matthew 10: 37-42). You must take up your cross, become devoted to goals beyond your immediate family's concerns. Doing so, you will receive a prophet's reward. Whoever receives you will receive me. You might consider your tasks menial, like giving a cup of water to a thirsty child. That kind of hospitality, however, is just what it means to become my disciples. Be assured, you will not lose your reward.

It is said that the flutter of a butterfly's wings can cause a hurricane on the other side of the world, the "butterfly effect" of small actions leading to an enormous impact. Giving a cup of water to a thirsty child may be compared to the cup of water the priest poured over your head when you were baptized, a very simple action, a washing with water. Your baptism was meant to have a profound impact, changing the whole course of your life. Are you on that course today? If you are, then we can have hope, for this community, and for the nation whose integrity we yearn to be restored.