



Pentecost and the nature of speaking the truth

In Christian thought, justice is one of the cardinal (or “hinge”) virtues. Mercy — also a virtue — is a fruit of the great theological virtue, charity. Together, mercy and justice should guide a mature Christian’s actions, choices and words.

Each virtue without the other is incomplete. Mercy without justice is little more than a warm feeling. It can ripen into what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace,” a disregard for truth in the name of compassion. Likewise, justice without mercy becomes a disguised form of revenge. Anger at society’s sins very easily feeds a habit of moral preening, with a selective blind spot for the sins we’d rather not discuss.

So when St. Paul urges us to “speak the truth with love,” he means the *whole* truth preached honestly, without editing, and ruled by charity. Pope Francis does this with extraordinary joy and simplicity, endearing him to people around the world.

Last week Georgetown University hosted a panel discussion on one of Francis’ main themes — poverty — featuring Arthur Brooks, Robert Putnam and President Obama. It was a useful event with valuable information. In the process though, the president displayed his curious leadership style by suggesting that Christians have spent too much time and energy on issues like abortion, at the expense of other issues that “capture the essence of who we are” as believers, like poverty.

As Ross Douthat and others quickly observed, “it would be too kind to call [the president’s] comments wrong; they were ridiculous.” Maybe so; maybe not. In the panel’s actual transcript, the president’s tone is affable and measured. But there’s some remarkable irony here, nonetheless.

Consider: The current administration threatens and interferes with scores of Church-affiliated social ministries serving the poor across the country because they won’t bend to its peculiar orthodoxies on abortion, contraception and sex. Then the *same* White House suggests that the Church spends too little time focusing on the poor and too much on abortion and sex.

In reality, prolife work in most dioceses, including Philadelphia, gets a fraction of the time and substantial funding devoted to social services and education. And it’s always been so. And it always *will* be so — unless government makes it impossible for Catholic social services to remain faithfully “Catholic.”

Church teaching on social justice is not a separate category, distinct from the rest of Catholic moral teaching. Catholic convictions about



sexual integrity, the nature of the family, protection for immigrants and shelter for the homeless *come from exactly the same roots; from exactly the same Christian understanding of who the human person is as a child of God.* Feeding the hungry and helping the poor are vitally important obligations for the Christian. But they give no one a license to disregard or downplay the destruction of unborn human life that happens on a mass scale every day in this country.

As America’s bishops wrote more than 15 years ago and many times since, the right to life is the foundation on which all other Catholic social action rests. If no “right to life” for the unborn child exists, all other rights are merely fiction.

Exactly 20 years ago this spring, John Paul II issued his great encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (“the Gospel of Life”). It’s worth re-reading. It stands in a long line of powerful social encyclicals that includes Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* and John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris*. In some ways, it speaks with unique relevance to the key struggles American Catholics face right now. Nor is its message less urgent in the life of the global Church.

Pope Francis has reiterated the dignity of the unborn child, the nature of human sexuality and the importance of the family in many of his own public statements — though his views on these matters get less attention, because they don’t quite fit with the common narrative of who this Pope is and what he might do.

Where does that leave us as the Easter season closes and we welcome the great celebration of Pentecost?

We need to make the virtues of mercy and justice come alive in our personal lives. And we need to embed them, by our witness, in the public policies and structures of our nation. Saving unborn children only to have them grow up in a culture of poverty and homelessness is not a result Christians can accept.

But there can be no “social justice,” no “common good” based on compassion and human dignity, in a nation that allows the daily, routine killing of its own weakest members — the developing lives of unborn children.

Pentecost Sunday is the “birthday of the Church” — the day the Holy Spirit filled the followers of Jesus Christ with the presence of God and the courage to preach his Gospel. It’s a good time to ask God for that same presence and courage in our own lives ... and the ability to speak the *whole* truth about justice and human dignity, with love.

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\$12 million award will help build senior housing in South Philadelphia

New affordable senior housing will be coming to the campus of the former St. John Neumann Catholic High School in South Philadelphia, thanks to a \$12 million tax credit allocation.

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) gave the credits and its Innovation in Design award to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia on May 14 to develop St. John Neumann Place II.

The project represents the second phase of St. John Neumann Place's 75 units of senior housing within the extensively renovated former archdiocesan high school, a project completed in 2008.

The new \$14.7 million project will create 52 affordable apartment units and a Wellness Center on a parcel of land adjacent to St. John Neumann Place.

The archdiocesan Office for Community Development and archdiocesan Catholic Health Care Services are collaborating on the project to add to their portfolio of independent living residences and community-based services for seniors.

St. John Neumann Place II's planned Wellness Center at the senior housing

residence is intended to provide residents as well as seniors from the Grays Ferry community with resources and programs that promote health and wellbeing while aging.

Construction is expected to begin next winter with occupancy targeted for early spring 2017.

Catholic schools' office announces leadership changes

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Office for Catholic Education announced changes in its administrative leadership this week with the resignation of Dr. Carol Cary, superintendent of secondary schools.

Cary will become superintendent of the Marple Newtown School District in Delaware County effective July 1, the archdiocese announced May 15. She led the 17 Catholic archdiocesan high schools in her position since 2012 and served in OCE since 2008.

In a letter thanking Cary for her service, Secretary for Catholic Education Christopher Mominey called Cary "a valued colleague" and pledged to make finding a new superintendent for secondary schools a top priority of OCE and the Faith in the Future Foundation, which together manage the archdiocesan high schools.

Following news of Cary's departure, Mominey named Debra Brillante superinten-

dent of elementary schools, effective immediately. Having served in the role for the past six months on an interim basis, Brillante will lead the archdiocese's 122 Catholic elementary schools.

She was chosen for the position after a search process by the Baltimore-based firm Educational Strategies, which specializes in Catholic education, according to an archdiocesan statement May 20.

Brillante boasts a long career in Catholic education especially in Syracuse, N.Y., where she worked with Mominey in that diocese's school system. Mominey became head of the Philadelphia archdiocesan school system in 2012.

In her interim role, Brillante "demonstrated that her style, approach and personal commitment to our mission in Catholic education are a perfect match for us as an organization at this critically important time," Mominey said in the statement. "Although our search process led to us reviewing candidates from across the nation, in the end Debbie proved to be the exact fit for us."

Earlier this year it was announced that Kevin Kijewski, OCE's associate superintendent for secondary schools, would be leaving his position July 1 to become superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Denver.

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