

There's No Need to be "Woke," but a need to Speak the Truth

Lately on social media and occasionally on TV, I've heard the term "woke." I'm not sure what it means. The way I understand it is like this: My dog Emmett likes to wake me at 4:30 a.m. sometimes to go outside. But I guess it has another meaning. So typing it into my preferred search engine of duck duck go (though "gray duck" would be more hip if you asked me) what it led me to was the Merriam-Webster website which defined it as a slang term as of 2017 that means "socially aware" but apparently not an official word just yet.

Social justice has a long tradition in our Catholic faith. Going back centuries the Church has spoken up for the poor, the marginalized, the worker, those in prison, the unborn, the immigrant. She has combated racism. She has spoken out against tyranny. Indeed, there's a long tradition there. To be fair however, as a Church made up of flawed people we also as a Church have failed many times throughout history. We as a Church have been silent, or enabled tyrants as well. We believe the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, but we are always striving to do the right thing. Sometimes both the laity and Church leaders have made mistakes, or worse, committed sins. But this does not change the fact that in every era, the Church has been vocal in the face of injustice.

To quote Pilate though, "what is truth?" It's a question people are trying to answer. And as the saying goes the road to hell is paved with good intentions. At this moment in our nation's history, I think some who would call themselves "woke" are being misled. Or, they have been misled and as a result are getting caught up in various causes that may sound good and gain support in the media and culture, but that many might question. Or they might wonder "well that sounds good, but I'm not so sure about it." But if one speaks up online or in public, they may fear being shunned or targeted. Hence, silence. And the result of this is what Edmund Burke said is the triumph of evil.

I do not know what constitutes "woke" social issues, but let's look at a few that have made the scene in recent years.

One is the current movement of "Black Lives Matter." This has been around for several years, and on it's surface, it sounds like a good movement. Catholics marched in the Civil Rights Movement and were supportive of Dr. Martin Luther King. Racism is abhorrent. But should one jump on board with the organization? A closer look at the movement would reveal some things that hopefully give a Catholic pause. For instance, they state: "We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and "villages" that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable." Additionally, in comments uncovered and reprinted in *The National Pulse*, Black Lives Matter co-founder Patrisse Cullors reveals that she and fellow co-founder Alicia Garza are followers of an ideology that is Marxist: "We actually do have an ideological frame. Myself and Alicia in particular, we're trained organizers. We are trained Marxists. We are super-versed on ideological theories." Now this is not to say that "Black Lives Matter" is a Marxist organization per se. It's also not to say that some

things people who are involved with the organization are not important things to fight for, namely combatting racism. But a Christian should also not fear being critical and questioning and speaking the truth, even if it is not politically popular. The point here is not to either condemn or affirm “Black Lives Matter,” but rather that we should speak the truth, and that is there are some things the organization stands for that are contrary to what we believe as Catholics.

In recent years there has also been a movement to re-define marriage. As such, it’s not uncommon to see various “pride” parades and movements every June; (more subdued this year due to Covid.). The Church affirms the dignity of the human person and condemns mistreatment based on orientation. At the same time, the Church affirms marriage as between a man and a woman. As a cardinal, Pope Francis was very critical of same-sex adoptions in Argentina. Yet to speak against this for many can be very fearful, for it does not seem popular to do so.

Back in March, I remember hearing something about “15 days to flatten the curve.” Here we are in mid July. I think we all want Covid to end. After all as the cliché goes “we’re all in this together.” But at a certain point, when some states ban singing in churches, or force churches to close, and ban gatherings for the faithful but not for a protest, should a Catholics do more to speak out? Or might they fear being seen as “not doing enough” to combat Covid if they go along time and time again with shutdowns made arbitrarily by a governor or mayor?

Lastly, immigration has been a front burner issue for years. The Church supports immigration, while recognizing countries need to have polices to control it. But at various points immigrants have been targets. Some might say they are all bad, keep them all out, etc. How do we react to polices that are too harsh on immigrants, or if we have people who use racist language around us?

Political winds shift, and no matter Republican or Democrat, you’ll find teachings of the Church that challenge you. Many of us can be quite firm in our partisanship and political beliefs; the author of this article no exception. I have strong political beliefs. But these are beliefs that are also rooted in my faith, and ultimately I choose the candidate that best reflects what I believe each election cycle. This article is not meant to sway you to choose Mr. Trump or Mr. Biden come November. But what I do hope that what we all do is that whether the wind is at our back or on our face, we do not keep our mouths shut. At daily Mass recently, we reflected on Matthew 10 where Jesus speaks of persecution and being hated because of His name. But the apostles are not to keep their mouths shut. Instead they are to evangelize; many are then killed because of it. I also think more recently of a hero to me, Saint Pope John Paul II, who boldly said “be not afraid” and gave people hope in his native Poland under the Iron Curtain; he didn’t keep his mouth shut and was nearly assassinated by the Communists because of it. For you and me, we can’t keep our mouths shut either. As I’ve written before, it’s so important we re-discover the art of the argument. We need to engage in dialogue. Some might not want to hear what we have to say and shut us out. So be it. But we cannot let fear take over. For as fear is an emotion, so people and their beliefs can be emotional. We do not

support racism; we do not support bigotry; we do not support attacking someone because of their sexuality. So it's quite understandable why someone would get involved in various causes. But it could be that while a person's intentions are good, they aren't fully aware of what they are supporting or the ramifications of the policies they advocate for.

Our goal as a Christian should not be to stand before God one day and say "well Lord, I didn't get into too much trouble down there. I went to Mass every week and fulfilled my obligation." How will we respond when God asks us what did you do when the going got tough? When you saw a friend going down the wrong road, or someone getting involved in things contrary to the faith? Rather we want to stand before God and have Him show us the difference we made through how we led our lives, which include actions, but also not being afraid to be hated because of the truth. "White martyrdom" is the martyrdom of being hated or suffering greatly for the truth without being killed. Sometimes those claiming to be tolerant will really get angry at us for what we believe in. But any wise parent probably has had a child get very angry with them too, but they knew they were doing the right thing for their child even if they didn't understand it. People are searching for the truth. Sometimes we are the ones who need to do some soul searching too and look at who or what we support and why we do so; but other times we can recognize evil in the world disguised under the pretenses of being good for society or not all that bad. When our conscience sees these things, let's not be afraid to speak to the truth; to engage rather than be silent; to argue rather than yell and shout; to pray for those who disagree with us rather than hate them or vilify them online. When fear takes over, we must look to the Cross and ask for fortitude, and be reminded of what Jesus did out of love for us all. He was killed, but ultimately triumphed. But in this action, He also saved so many. What good we too can do when we join our sufferings to the Lord's, and strive to help people see the truth.

God bless,

Fr. Paul