

## THE NEED TO RECLAIM AND LIVE WITH MORAL COURAGE

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Recently, I heard that the word most frequently looked up in Webster's Dictionary in the past year was "integrity." This may reflect a concern people have about today's media reports. When you turn on TV to watch the evening news or read the daily paper, the headlines make one wonder whatever happened to integrity and moral courage.

Recently, I was pleasantly surprised to read about a program started by Case High School students in Racine, Wisconsin, who initiated and lead a program called "Respect."

They address the violent and abusive language often used by students among each other in our schools. They are already feeling a positive effect from their efforts. It was a refreshing change from stories of abuse of every kind that relate to business, government, politics and economics and church as well. How can we reclaim our moral courage and address these issues and bring about needed change?

For too long, we have separated ethics and moral codes from every aspect of our lives. They are frequently missing in families, in schools and other areas. When we separate moral codes from daily living, they no longer influence the choices we make.

We need to restore a moral vision in board room, in classroom, in the halls of government and church gatherings and wherever people gather and make decisions that affect the human family. This will call people to be caring, concerned, compassionate and just remind us that every choice we make has social and moral consequences. As we share that vision and grow in moral courage, we can learn how to challenge our reliance on military and nuclear power, our sense of empire as a nation, and our addiction to a very comfortable standard of living and our great love for independence apart from the common good.

We can all start to re-imagine life as God intended it to be, that is life without white power and privilege, and life lived with moral courage in all aspects, including corporate and social settings and see life as a journey toward wholeness, and not as a walk-through life for our personal gain. This reminds me of time I spent in India at a U.N. Development Conference to consider the needs of the poorest around the world. The first thing we learned as to greet each person with the word "Namaste" which means: "I

honor you for your innate goodness and for the divine spark within you and for the potential you have.” No matter what you see on the outside, each person has goodness within. From this foundation of respect, moral codes, truth telling, integrity and moral empowerment could be learned and advanced in daily life. Moral courage takes practice every day. Will Rogers humorously reminds us that “if we get on the right track, we will get run over if we just sit there.” Keep on moving in the right direction.

Perhaps church groups or circles of care and concern could be formed to examine injustice and violence of every kind and redefine success and good living in today’s world. Hopefully children would then catch on to these values from the adults in their lives.

Some time ago, Rabbi Gellman who grew up in the Milwaukee area, told this story called “Partners.” It goes like this: “God made human beings and then said to them. “Now I’m going to rest. Please finish off the world for me. Really, it’s nearly all done.” But the man and woman answered: “We cannot do this all by ourselves. You have big plans; God and we are so little. ‘Then God said to them: “You are big enough. If you agree to finish the world for me, I will be your partner.”’ The man and woman were puzzled: “What’s a partner?” they asked. God answered: “A partner is someone you work with on a very big project that neither one could try to do alone. If you have a partner, you can never give up because someone else is depending on you.” That’s a deal, they said, One day an angel stopped by and asked God if the world was finished yet. “Go ask my partners” said God. Rabbi Gellman,( “Does God Have a Big Toe?”, Harper Collins, 1989)

I believe in every reflection on the Word of God and in every gathering, that question posed by God in the story needs to be considered: “How are my partners doing?” Like the prophets of old, we are asked to be articulators of God’s vision for the world and to be partners with God in making it a reality in our time and place. It will take more than politics, more than military might, or power and privilege. It will take a true partnership with our God and a claiming and proclaiming of God’s power in every area of our lives, public and private.

Moral courage can be taught and learned. Its presence or absence sheds lights on many of the world’s successes or failures, tragedies or triumphs, down through the years and in our present age. Now is the time to reclaim

and live with moral courage so that we and our descendants may have life, hope and meaning for years to come.

Let us begin today courageously.