

Words should convey truth with love

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

There is a sign hanging on a wall in the Personnel Division which reads "To undo a rumor is like unringing a bell." When I saw that sign recently, those words — of all of the words I read that day — caught my eye and stuck in my spirit.

It's not always easy to know why a particular phrase or picture or experience will stay in one's memory while 1,000 others do not. I am not entirely sure why this one did, but I do suspect that it has stayed with me for two reasons. One is the arrival of the Advent season with its emphasis on hearing the Word and speaking the Word in truth. The other is the damage and confusion I know are caused by rumors.

I won't go to great length writing about either of those reasons. But of the Advent season, let me point up the heightened importance and richness of the Word of God and the dispositions of the heart that allow us to be truly attentive to that Word.

The Word is a communication of the interiority, the inner mystery of the God-life to us creatures. It is a gift pre-

vious beyond belief, which is so loving and so true as to transform our inner life if we let it touch us and are willing to let it lead us. It is an event so powerful, this divine speaking and human listening, and requires such vulnerability in us, that it can be carried out only in a relationship of absolute trust.

We know that our vulnerability will never be abused because God is always faithful. There can be pain in receiving and following the Word of God. But that pain comes not from God but from the conversion from selfishness to which God's Word always calls us.

I think of John the Baptizer, Mary the Mother of Jesus, and Jesus, himself, as they come to us in our Advent readings. Their simplicity in attending to the Word of God and their utter integrity in speaking it model for us in a powerful manner the way in which we should attend to the truth however the truth may come to us.

I think of John the Baptizer. I think of Jesus of Nazareth. I think of Mary, his mother. Each was utterly simple and open before the Word of God. Each was totally disposed to follow

that Word wherever it led. Each of them acted and spoke with utter integrity. There was no guile in any of them.

Mary and John and Jesus are wonderful models for our attentiveness to God and to one another. They also can help us to reflect on how we use the precious gift of speech. That gift is meant to build up, to encourage, to communicate life. It is a privileged vehicle by which we communicate our interiority to one another. It is meant to bear poetry, dreams and music and our response to the God who loves us so much.

Because words are so important in human relationships and the conduct of society, we have a right to expect that the words we use will always convey the truth spoken in love. Our words are never meant to be hammers that bludgeon or blades that cut. They are not given to us to be used to demean or diminish another or to bear a part of the truth when fuller truth is available to us.

We are in a season in which we celebrate the wonderful reality that "The



Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," when we honor especially the woman who received the Word in her heart and brought the Word into the world.

It is good for us to take some time to reflect on how we listen to one another and how we speak. Our use of such gifts says a lot about how we understand and respond to the goodness of God.

Peace to all.

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