

Reflection for April 27, 2025 – Let God Speak

Inspired by Acts 5:27-32

Jesus' apostles have continued to preach, teach and heal. Just prior to their arrest by the high priest, they had been bringing the sick into the streets. Apparently great numbers would gather from towns around Jerusalem (5:16) ***“bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.”***¹

Jesus' ministry was continuing, his resurrected presence living on as he had promised. It didn't seem to matter much what the authorities tried to do, the followers believed and would not be silenced.

And when they are questioned by the high priest, (it is really more of a scolding) ***“We gave you strict orders not to teach in his name,”*** they respond ***“We must obey God rather than any human authority,”***^[b] ³⁰ Just one line from an ancient text, but it packs a most powerful punch.

A former boss of mine during my tenure in Health Canada had great advice for me when I was about to become unglued about a staffing issue. He would say, “I’m best not to poke a sleeping bear with a stick.” The apostles poke a sleeping giant with a hot iron. But their conviction is stronger than any possible consequences they might suffer.

Those few words, ***“We must obey God rather than any human authority,”*** are indeed most profound. They should be emblazoned on every Coat of Arms and included in every Vision Statement. It would be something wouldn't it, if those words were fundamental to every constitution that was proudly displayed in every government office. ***“We must obey God rather than any human authority!”***

We must obey God – We must remember above all else not to let our personal agendas take control of us. We must care for everyone as God the creator would.

If God is compassion and unconditional love, then we must love our neighbour as ourselves. We must see the beauty in every individual, whether or not they have immigration papers, whether or not they are desperate enough to cross unforgiveable deserts in searing heat, or dangerous seas in leaky boats. Obey God means do what God would expect, live like Jesus lived and lives. Practice kindness and live generously. Honour our differences rather than let them separate us. Work together to build relationships rather than prejudge and exclude.

Building caring, compassionate and loving communities is pretty straightforward. We all know how to do it. And yet that is an unrealized dream.

It seems there is more energy spent erecting protectionist barriers between neighbours isolating one another, rather than getting to know each another. There is more of an appetite to live based on mistrust rather than mutuality. Holding tightly on to what is seen as a birthright prevails over the possibility of sharing. A perception of what is mine or ours prevails. And a desire to stick to a perceived self-righteous moral high ground, stands in the way of any possible compromise.

How do you see yourself in God's community? Are you a follower of Jesus, a believer, a truth-teller? How would you see yourself standing up to the temple priest telling you to stop doing the work Jesus began? Would your answer be similar to that of the apostles? Would the spirit within you motivate you to say that your faith surpasses any human authority?

¹ Acts 5:16, NRSV Updated Edition

I ask because today I think it is really important we remember to **“Let God Speak.”** And when we do, we need to listen carefully to what the Holy Presence is saying. That voice cuts through the rhetoric of selfishness, coercion, condemnation and abuse. The truth prevails.

Pope Francis will be remembered as a real trailblazer in both the Catholic Church, other Churches and faiths and the secular world. He was a truth-teller. He was a pastoral and justice seeking pope, unlike any of his predecessors.

Francis spoke openly about the climate crisis and environmental stewardship and offered historic apologies to survivors of clergy sexual abuse. He apologized to the Indigenous people of Canada for the trauma they experienced at residential schools. He washed and kissed the feet of women prisoners in Rome. And while it could be said he didn't go far enough, his allowance for the blessing of “same sex” couples in the Catholic Church was a milestone.

Francis would also speak critically about abuse of authority and acts of violence, as he did condemn Israel's continued attacks in Gaza and Lebanon as **“immoral” and disproportionate. He actually called for an investigation to determine if Israel's attacks in Gaza constitute(d) genocide, a charge Israel denies(d) while investigations at the U.N.'s top courts proceed(d).**²

I would say that through his papacy, Francis was letting God speak.

But as it happens to many who speak the truth to power and authority, he got a resounding rebuke on more than one occasion. The last, after a short message of condolence posted by Israel's foreign minister was removed. The message read, **“Rest in peace, Pope Francis. May his memory be a blessing.”**³ It was actually removed by the Israeli Prime Minister a few hours after it had been posted. Can you imagine? Removing a post offering a blessing?

It seems even in the death of a revered and remarkable world leader politics does not take a back seat. God was speaking about justice. But justice would not be heard, even by the nation where the birth of Christ took place, the nation that biblical literature suggests was favoured by God.

It doesn't seem likely to me that God would condemn anyone let alone a saint.

It is such a sad commentary when we try and let God speak that there are those around us that would rather, we stay complacent and remain quiet. Many ears remain closed. The truth is a hard lesson to face, especially if you are hiding behind deceit.

Jesus and the apostles both faced the ire of the priestly order. We know Jesus faced the cross as his ministry threatened to expose corruption and self-interest. The apostles carried on in Jesus' stead preaching justice, equality and healing. Both were letting God speak through them. That message has carried on for millennia.

We let God speak through us today and everyday when we say our moral standard is not that associated with human authority, it comes from God and God alone. Sometimes we will face the ire of others who would scold us, or ridicule us. But we know when God speaks, we listen. We listen and do our best to follow.

And thank you for listening this morning, Amen

² [Israel's deleted condolence X message on pope's death](#), accessed April 26, 2025

³ Ibid., April 26, 2025