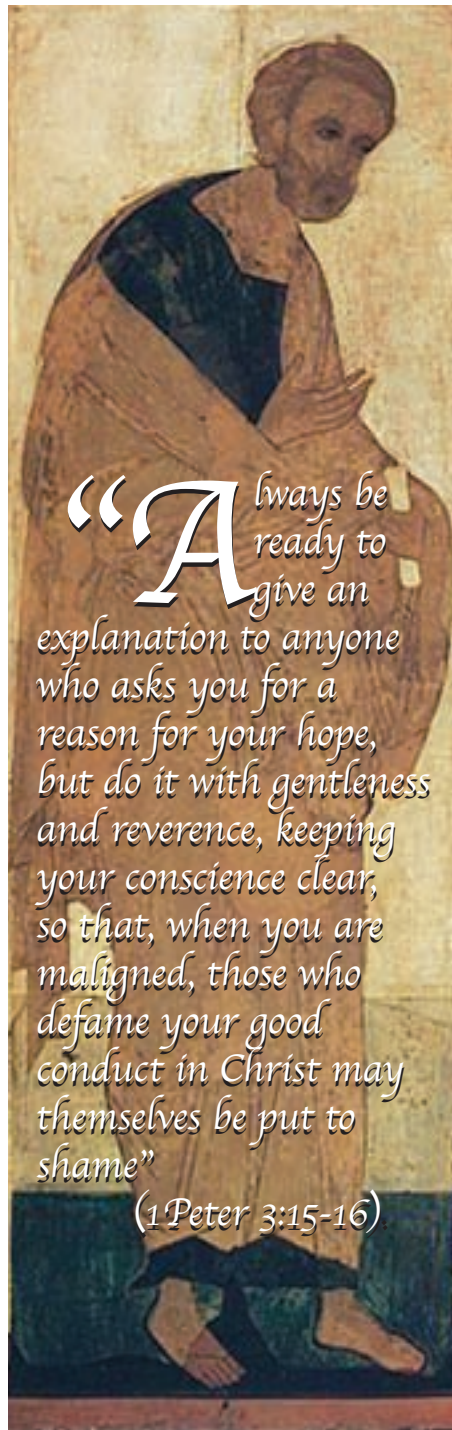


How will we give witness to our faith?



“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame”

(1 Peter 3:15-16)

The unfolding election season is once again demonstrating an unflattering characteristic of 21st century America: Our tendency to quarrel and accuse rather than rationally consider the issues at hand.

Sound bites seem to carry more weight than moral principles. The way we engage in political debate polarizes rather than unites.

But enough about politics. I would like to consider what Scripture teaches about how we interact with one another at every level. The election offers a backdrop for examining how we witness our faith, whether the topic is religion, terrorism or the price of gas.

We have many opportunities to give witness to our faith. We are often questioned about Catholic beliefs and challenged to explain their validity, and perhaps at times we are tempted to react with emotion rather than faith.

In discussions with friends and co-workers about any number of topics, we come face-to-face with the tendency to draw up sides and choose corners.

‘Gentleness and reverence’

In the first of his letters, Peter invites Christians to understand the nature of our community and how God calls us to interact with one another. He encourages us to live in a way consistent with our new life and proposes obedience, reverence and mutual love.

Those being built into God’s spiritual house, he writes, reject malice, deceit, insincerity, envy and slander. They give good example to non-believers, are good citizens, follow the humble example of Jesus and live in unity with one another.

He concludes this section with an intriguing word of encouragement in

a time of hostility: “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:15-16).

We can be maligned (or feel maligned) for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. The question is: How will we respond? Peter suggests we respond with hope-

filled gentleness and reverence for the other person, so that while speaking the truth we will also be imitating our humble savior.

Did Jesus verbally assault opponents with clever arguments in order to embarrass them? Did he summarily condemn people who were in error, or did he patiently lead them to the right path?

Truth in love

A sarcastic comeback may grab a few laughs or give a momentary sense of satisfaction, but we have failed if we have not spoken the truth while imitating our Lord.

Peter was writing about how we communicate the hope that is in us because of Christ. His premise was that there is such a thing as truth, and it is found fully in Christ.



ARCHBISHOP
J. PETER
SARTAIN

DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN’S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain’s Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.

Christians are to live the truth; thus, when a Christian speaks about it, others may see that he or she is also putting it into practice. We are filled with hope, even at times of hostility, precisely because Christ, the truth, speaks for himself.

He has no need of our clever arguments, our sarcasm or our angry debate. Rather, he asks that we become shining examples of his truth.

In the coming months we will watch many debates, hear many insults and be asked our opinions (and that’s not even considering the elections!).

In certain circumstances, we may be tempted to speak and react in un-Christian ways. We will infuse the peace of Christ into our homes, our workplaces and this season of political heat if we remember the counsel of Peter and always speak the truth in love, as did our Lord.

A sarcastic comeback may grab a few laughs or give a momentary sense of satisfaction, but we have failed if we have not spoken the truth while imitating our Lord.