Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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‘They were plotting to catch him at something he might say” (Luke 11:54).

Rom 3:21-30; Luke 11:47-54

The news each day has stories about important people in politics, business or media who have said untoward things and not realized they were being recorded or too close to an open mike. Even if they don’t fall from grace or have to resign, they must endure the next news cycle replaying their gaffes.

The last line of today’s Gospel reports that the scribes and Pharisees, enraged by Jesus’ attacks on them for being hypocrites, are “plotting to catch him in something he might say” (Luke 11:54). Jesus is speaking openly about them, and the crowds are enjoying his criticism, but what the leaders really want is enough evidence to prove that Jesus is speaking heretically or maligning the temple. Their goal is to bring Jesus to trial before the Sanhedrin and have him condemned, which they eventually do before his death.

Within each one’s narrative structures, the four Gospels are in large measure a record of what Jesus said. They provide a transcript of his public teachings, private

discourses with his followers, parables, debates and observations. Some Bibles print his words in red out of reverence, but this also reveals just how much of the text is attributed to Jesus himself.

We come to the daily readings to hear the voice of Jesus. While his words are filtered through the evangelists, who recorded the memories of the early witnesses and the first generation of preachers, we find a lively sense of a Living Voice addressing us personally when we read or listen to the Scriptures. Some days it is enough to take a single sentence or phrase to pray over in our own circumstances. Experience over time reveals that the Word we read is also reading us, probing our thoughts, teaching us to see and judge differently. We seek to “catch Jesus in something he might say” to us intimately, and he in turn catches us and reveals something new to us.

What we know as the traditional examination of conscience at the end of the day could also be a review of the transcript of our own words that day. How many brought encouragement or joy to others? Or not? If we had to be accountable for everything we said, how many of us would survive an open mike or public scrutiny? Spirituality is an interior conversation with God and with the world. The words we bring to this conversation convey confidence or doubt, hope or anxiety. If we are truly “formed by the word of God,” we will put on the mind of Christ and follow the inspiration of the Spirit. Then we can be bearers of the Good News in all we say and do.

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