Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“By their fruits you will know them" (Matt 7:20).

Gn 15:1-12, 17-18; Mt 7:15-20

The two images Jesus uses to describe our need for discernment reveal that it is not always easy to know the truth.

A "wolf in sheep's clothing " is known after the damage has been done. How many popular leaders are later unmasked as frauds who manipulated people, cooked the books, covered their tracks and blamed others for problems until it was evident that they, in fact, were the problem all along?

"By their fruits you will know them" is another trustworthy measure of authentic performance, but it too takes time to show who is productive and who is not. We often know only in hindsight who was doing the work and in it for the long haul, and those who were all show and no substance. Appearance is deceptive. Talk is just talk.

An authentic person is one who speaks and acts in a genuine way because this is who they really are. Jesus called disciples who were willing to ground their lives in him even as he was grounded in God. God is the source of all goodness, and any lasting good we produce is the result of God's goodness flowing through us.

Discipleship forms us in this goodness through the imitation of Christ. Someone who is continually asking what Jesus would do in a given situation is not likely to deceive or hurt others. Growth in discipleship is a daily process until we form habits of sensitivity and generosity that become our natural response to others. This is what the Word calls us to and will help form us to be.

Today we remember St. Irenaeus, a second century bishop and martyr, who said that “the glory of God is a human being fully alive.” When we are alive to God and to our own nature created in the divine image, we make visible the face of God. What an intimate opportunity this is for every one of us!

Pencil Postscript

I am writing to NCR readers of *Pencil Preaching* to announce my retirement.

Age, energy, and freedom to focus on the “Francis” comic strip (which will continue) are all factors. I welcome this transition after 25 years with *NCR*, and I ask you to continue to support the paper for news and analysis you can only get here. My last column will be on Friday, June 30. I am open to future writing opportunities with NCR, but nothing specific is planned for now.

Special thanks to my editor, Heidi Schlumpf, to retired editor Tom Roberts, to Shannon Evans and former *Celebration* columnist Fr. Lawrence Mick, who has monitored the column and made valuable suggestions since the death of my wife, Diane Marrin, in 2021. These friends and colleagues have all helped edit *Pencil Preaching* for publication. I add Sr. Mary McGlone, CSJ, whose Sunday Scripture columns remind us that the Word of God is the source of our Catholic identity and the heart of our faith. The joy of writing the column has been enhanced by reader

emails and support. For this I am deeply grateful.