

STAYING UNCONVINCED: RESISTING A RUSH TO JUDGMENT

The waiting seemed interminable—sitting at the top of the stairs on Christmas morning, prior to going downstairs to open presents. I was ready to go at 5:00 a.m. Why wasn't everyone else? I received an early lesson in patience, one from which I have drawn many times over the years. The shoe is on the other foot now, as increasingly **people loathe waiting**, fear solitude and **abhor silence**. Today, we live in a society demanding immediate service. This is one reason among others, why some traditionally popular restaurants have faded from the scene. People are no longer interested in what they perceive to be an old-fashioned dinner stretched out over time. Even restaurants boasting delectable fare tend to move people along, turning over the tables several times per evening. Too often, a server has approached the table, though a few bites remain. “May I take your plate, sir?” “Um, actually...no, not quite yet,” comes my sheepish, almost apologetic response. What's the rush?

Nor should a rush to judgment with respect to others surprise us. This is no mere annoyance, as with the well-intentioned restaurant wait staff. We are dealing with people's reputations and that is far more consequential. Remember **Richard Jewell**? He was the fellow implicated during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta GA. His face was plastered all over the news. Richard was summarily accused and convicted in the court of public opinion. He quickly morphed from observant security guard to Olympic bombing suspect. On July 27, 1996, he acted quickly, moving people away from a suspicious unattended green knapsack and was praised for his efforts. In a flash, that all changed three days later. Jewell would later describe the full force of law enforcement at his door as akin to “Piranha on a bleeding cow.” The investigation dragged on until October and though cleared, Jewell never fully recovered from the negative attention and died at age 44 in 2007. The only saving grace was that in 2005, Eric Rudolph pled guilty and is now serving a life sentence.

More recently, the boys from **Covington Catholic** were thrust into the national spotlight over a most unfortunate series of events following the March for Life in Washington D.C. The particulars are well known and do not need repeating. Suffice it to say, a serious rush to judgment occurred and I believe they are still **owed an apology** by numerous politicians and at least one neighboring Catholic bishop in their own home state who wrote: “I am ashamed that the actions of Kentucky Catholic high school students have become a contradiction of the very reverence for human life that the march is supposed to manifest.” To my knowledge, he has not retracted his stinging condemnation. Questions about the role of chaperones or how the situation might have been diffused aside, here a **clear rush to judgment** damaged a young man's reputation, for no good reason. The source of the viral video is being sought, and the same attorney who represented Richard Jewell has been retained.

Our Catholic faith has something to say about **rash judgment** and it bears noting. One is guilty of **rash judgment** who “even tacitly, assumes as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of a neighbor.” (See Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2477). If we do so without an objectively valid reason and disclose another's fault to one who was previously unaware, then we are guilty further of **detraction**. If we persist even further and spread what we know to be **untrue** in order to harm another's reputation, then we have committed the sin of calumny. It is a logical progression, with all being offenses against the truth according to the 8th commandment in varying degrees.

To avoid rash judgment, we are cautioned to interpret our neighbor's thoughts in as **favorable a light as possible**. In St. Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, 22, we read: “Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another's statement than to condemn it. But if he cannot do so, let him ask how the other understands it. And if the latter understands it badly, let the former correct him with love. If that does not suffice, let the Christian try all suitable ways to bring the other to a correct interpretation so that he may be saved.” (see CCC # 2478) Instead, it seems that people fall over themselves to be the first—the first to condemn, the first to call for resignation, the first to express outrage, etc. What is wrong with **staying unconvinced** for a time?

Sacred Scripture is filled with **kernels of wisdom** for our daily lives: “Those who spare their words are truly

knowledgeable, and those who are discreet are intelligent.” (Proverbs 17:27); “A time to mend, and a time to sew; a time to be silent, and a time to speak.” (Ecclesiastes 3:7); “Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20) While there may be personal satisfaction in being among the first to do or say something, absent all the facts, virtue disposes us to be more concerned about the right of others to their good reputation. Resist the temptation to rush to judgment.

- So, the Super Bowl entertainers were criticized for NOT being political during their performance? Talk about a lose-lose situation! I celebrated the Sunday 5:00 p.m. Mass before heading to a family birthday celebration at which none of us was particularly interested in the game. We even ate in a real dining room—with **no TV**! Still, I feel for anyone who is criticized because they are just trying to entertain for 20 minutes! As far as the commercials— I did not see enough of them, only catching the 4th quarter.
- Addressing Italian National Day for Life leaders, **Pope Francis** appealed “to all politicians, regardless of their faith convictions, to treat the defense of the lives of those who are about to be born and enter into society as the **cornerstone** of the common good,” adding “Voluntarily extinguishing life in its blossoming is, **in every case, a betrayal** of our vocation, as well as of the pact that binds generations together, which allows us to look forward with hope.”
- I was edified by how many came forward for the **St. Blaise throat blessing** at our Sunday morning Masses. Catholic sacramentals are rich and varied and are illustrative of an incarnational approach to the faith. We are drawn to sights and sounds; the feel of the candles resting on my shoulders when I received the blessing was reassuring. I love these Catholic customs and evidently, so do you!
- The Minneapolis Sports Facilities is shelling out **\$10 million** for the privilege of hosting the NCAA Final Four. Experts believe the expenditure is justified because 90,000 visitors will contribute on average \$1,500 per person to the local economy. Half the local money is for **blackout curtains** because the natural light entering US Bank Stadium during practice sessions will not be there during the evening games. What? \$5 million because the practice lighting cannot be different than game night conditions? My bad...I thought we were dealing with amateur athletics in the NCAA.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector