

Traveling companion: Catholic bashing

Fr. Michael Tracey

Yesterday, I received the following email from Maria. It read: “Father, I am one of your parishioners and my kids all go to Holy Trinity and OLA My question is this, I am in school at William Carey which is baptist and am required to take their New Testament class. Our instructor, who is a baptist minister, is constantly bashing catholics. He says that we worship false idols (Mary and the Saints) and the whole idea of the Pope is ridiculous. As a catholic in a foreign atmosphere, should I sit silent because I am in his class at a baptist university? Or am I supposed to defend our faith? I feel guilty sitting there silently, like I am betraying my faith and my own family and I just don't know what, if anything, I am supposed to do.....If you have time to give me a suggestion I would appreciate it but if not, I understand Thank you very much, Maria”

It seems that Catholic bashing is alive and well still. It is sad that ministers of other religions and teachers have to resort to bashing one religion in order to give their own religion more status. One wonders what happens to religious tolerance. One questions why other ministers and educated teachers feel so comfortable in expounding untruths, falsehoods and ignorance about the Catholic Church to impressionable young people and adults who often feel threatened by such “experts.” One also wonders, if Catholics, in such classes, question their teachers and professors about their stances, will it have repercussions on final grades in their exams.

Later that afternoon, I met a young man who is pursuing a doctorate degree at a Jesuit university. He mentioned that all his professors were very compassionate and understanding. What troubled him most were the textbooks recommended for the courses. He mentioned that most of the textbooks were written by former priests or Catholics who had left the church. He wondered what kind of witness this showed.

The young man mentioned his reasons for pursuing his doctorate in a particular area. His area of study is bioethics. He saw this as a rapidly expanding field, mentioning such areas as stem cell research, euthanasia, end of life issues, in vitro fertilization and capital punishment. He wanted to explore such issues from a Catholic perspective so that, one day, he may be able to pass on that perspective to other Catholics and his own family through his teaching and ministry.

Both the email and the encounter with the young man made me aware of several things. First of all, both of them have something in common. Both of them, in their own unique ways, wish to witness to their Catholic faith. Both are hungering for a deeper knowledge of their faith, not only to understand it better but also to put it into practice in an adult manner.

Secondly, it makes us, as Catholic, more aware of need to continue growing in our faith; asking the questions, finding out the answers and become more aware of the nuances of our faith.

Thirdly, it makes us, as Catholic, realize more and more that our education in the faith does not end with our Confirmation day and, that, after such, the Holy Spirit, will guide us through all the challenges to our faith that we might experience. Still, the Holy Spirit needs us to do our part by doing our homework and becoming a more educated Catholic in our faith, and education that is ongoing.

Finally, we must never feel we have to apologize for our faith or allow others to trample on it through their gross ignorance and cynical approach. We have been around too long and have worked too hard to allow anyone to take away our dignity and pride in our Catholic faith.

Now, I need to reply to Maria's email and give her some insights on how she might deal with ignorance personified by witnessing to the treasures of her own faith.