

Honesty, Healing and Wholeness

By Rev. Robert L. Marciano, KHS
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Smithfield, RI—President and Mrs. Machtley, Reverend Clergy, Campus Ministry staff, distinguished public officials, faculty, staff and students of Bryant University and Bishop Hendricken High School, my dear friends:

Allow me first to say a word of sincere gratitude to Mrs. Machtley and the Interfaith Breakfast committee for their kind invitation to be the keynote speaker at this year's breakfast. As you may know, each year we rotate a different faith group to be our speaker including our Jewish, Christian, Catholic and Muslim friends. Since this year it fell to a Catholic speaker, and Pope Francis was not available, I was given the honor. It is always a pleasure to be part of campus life here at Bryant and especially to be part of such a great event as this: to gather people of **all** faiths and in a spirit of cooperation and respect focus on the one task that we all share: to know, love and serve the One who made us and to do so together. As you may know, our theme this year is ***Honesty, Healing and Wholeness***, the pathway to true peace in this life and hopefully the tools we can use to get to the next.

Allow me, then, to begin with a story. It's about a new pastor of proud Italian heritage in a big Italian parish not far from here. On his first weekend in his welcome sermon at all the Masses, he decides to speak a few words in Italian—even though he doesn't speak Italian. So he asks a good friend who is fluent in

Italian to translate phonetically a few sentences that he gives to his friend and then spends a few hours with him practicing the lines.

Well, the first Mass on Saturday evening goes great. The people love the sermon and even applaud. The sermon to Sunday's early morning crowd, made up mostly of senior members of the parish, goes fine, too, until after Mass a very elderly and very Italian lady goes up to Father and begins speaking at a fast clip in thick, strong **Italian**. When she stops for a moment to take a breath he blurts out, "*Non pollo Italia!*" which he thinks means "I do not speak Italian!" Now, she stops and looks at him and with a wave of her giant Italian hand (that has probably made 7,000 meatballs in her lifetime!) blurts out loudly an Italian phrase that needs no translation, "**Ayyyyyy ...**" and turns and walks away. Mayor Lombardi, how many times do you say that in one day in North Providence?

When he gets back to the rectory he calls his good friend and tells him the entire story. His friend says to him, "Tell me Father, what were you trying to say to her?" To which Father replied, "I said, '*Non pollo Italia!*' I don't speak Italian!"

"Well," his friend says, "Father, you should have said, '*Non parlo Italiano.*'"

"Ohhhh, really," Father says. "So what did I say to her?" To which his friend answers with a chuckle, "You told her that there are no chickens in Italy."

Now as you noticed I did not attach a name to this story so Father Pescatello your secret is safe with me!

Honesty is a good policy, in life, in big parishes and in not-so-big parishes. If you don't speak Italian, don't speak Italian! Surely for each of us, pilgrims on this pathway of life using our faith to guide us, the first step on the journey is **honesty**

about our own humanity, our virtues and our vices. Putting the mirror up to our lives, our relationship with the Almighty and with others is so important that it gives us the key to deepening our spiritual life oftentimes hidden within us and known only **to** us.

In the Catholic tradition, probably the most difficult of the 7 Sacraments to celebrate is the Sacrament of Penance, or Confession, where we take the Words of Jesus spoken to Peter and his power and the power of bishops and priests to forgive sins literally. So penitents would go to the priest, a sinner himself, and tell him their sins to seek forgiveness and absolution. It's difficult for anyone, priest or penitent, to sit down and **honestly** ask *what is wrong in me, in my life and in my relationship with God and others and what needs fixing?* Especially in these modern days where **nothing** seems wrong at all. That honesty can make all the difference.

In my ministry as Chaplain to the Warwick Police Department the officers often joke that they are so bad that I don't have the time to hear their confessions! I always reply, "Oh, I have plenty of time, but **you** might not have the time to do the penance!"

Many of you may remember the Oklahoma City Bombing of April, 19, 1995. That tragic terrorist act that destroyed the Murrah building was carried out by a young man named Timothy McVeigh, who was filled with mental illness and possibly PTSD that took 186 innocent lives. The story that is often missed is the incredible kindness and friendship between a man named Bill Welch, the father of Julie Welch, a 23-year-old worker who died in the building that day, and Bill McVeigh, the father of the bomber.

Welch, after realizing that his many visits to the site, his constant drinking, and internal anger were not bringing him any healing. With the impending execution of the bomber as his life's focus he said, "The year after Julie died was the most miserable of my life. Self-medicating with alcohol and going through a long period of wanting retribution, including wanting the death penalty—allowable by Oklahoma law—for the bomber was eating me alive."

It wasn't until 1998 at the suggestion of Sister Rosalyn, a nun from his parish, that he went to meet Bill McVeigh, the bomber's father, and Jennifer, the bomber's sister in a very emotional meeting in Buffalo, New York. Mr. Welch credits his healing and his wholeness now, and his worldwide travels and campaign against the death penalty, with his forgiveness of Timothy, the bomber. **Healing of a wounded soul** and a broken life both inside and outside is a divine gift that we, like Bill Welch, can share with others. But not just his soul and spirit, but many others, some unknown to him.

At Bishop Hendricken High School, where I am privileged to serve as President of this premier and nationally accredited all-boys high school in Warwick and the finest in the nation, (how was that, Mr. DeCiccio, for a plug?), our entire mission and core of our work is to help mold young men in the Catholic tradition of love of God and lifelong service of others. Our world, so brimming with hate, violence, and personal privilege, is in dire need of people who seek to better our world and society by living lives of faith, virtue, goodness, and kindness. Tonight, our Hendricken men will venture to Peru to lend a hand to the poorest people of the planet, but perhaps the most wholesome of all. Our men will travel far with a simple message of love and service—not to change the world but to lift the burdens

of poverty if even for a moment. What is more noble than that? What is more needed than that? In all of our faith traditions, many though they are, we are joined by that thread of goodness planted within each of us by a Divine Hand that allows us to share His life with our lives lived for others.

My friends, if we seek to arrive at a **wholeness** in this life; if we are to be faithful to the image that the Almighty has placed of Himself in us, unique and special in each us all, then we must be **honest** about **who** we are and **who we should** become, and always act as **wounded** healers of others so that we can be healed ourselves.

A few minutes ago I mentioned that Bill Welch had touched and healed others not known to him. Well, after a talk that he gave in London on behalf of Amnesty International, a longtime member of LifeLines¹, Karen Collett, went up to speak to him. She told him that she was in Oklahoma City with her children visiting her pen pal on the day of the bombing. Mrs. Collett says in the years following the bombing the inmates where McVeigh was held heard about Welch. She said to him, “They talked about you and said you were remarkable. I used to send cuttings and they would send cuttings of you back,” she told him, trying her best not to cry. “On behalf of myself and the men on death row, I think you’re extraordinary.”

My friends, she was right, they are right, and today proves it—that people of **faith** always are! Thank you and God bless you.

¹ LifeLines supports and befriends prisoners on Death Row throughout the United States through letter writing.