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On December 1st, 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, a 42-year-old seamstress, an African-American woman, did a daring and revolutionary thing. She remained seated on a crowded public bus. Within a few moments, the enraged bus driver had summoned the police.

The woman was arrested, handcuffed, fingerprinted, and jailed. Many years later, a young graduate student from New York University, while completing his doctoral dissertation, was granted an interview with Rosa Parks was her name. After the event in Montgomery, she had lost her job at the department store where she was working and had to move in with relatives in Detroit.

One of the first questions he asked her was, why did you sit down that day in Montgomery? And I love her response. Rosa Parks was not a well-educated woman in some ways, but extremely wise. And her response was, I sat down because I was tired.

But it wasn't my feet, my soul was tired. And I was slowly coming to realize that no punishment that anyone else would inflict upon me could be more painful than the one I was inflicting upon myself, trying to live a double life. I was watching the slow erosion of my authenticity, my integrity.

You know, all this week, Father Rick and I have been speaking of virtues along the golden road, Rick calls it. On Wednesday, I spoke of fidelity. Today, I'd like to speak about integrity.

It's a word that comes from integer, a Latin word that means whole. And I'm convinced that holiness is wholeness. And we are called to integrate.

Yesterday, Father Rick asked us a really provocative question. Have you benched your conscience? And I'm going to probe that question a little bit this afternoon. I first got this idea of talking about integrity from a series of very short videos, home videos that parents took of their little ones, little toddlers caught in the very act of disobedience or mischief.

You know, there's one where about 18 inches off the floor, all along the wall of the dining room are little crayon drawings. And there's the little two-year-old or three-year-old with the crayon in his hand and he's blaming the dog. It's so cute.

Or there's one of the kitchen and on the counter is a beautiful chocolate frosted cake and a big gouge out of the side. And there's a little girl with a pretty little pink dress but it's covered with chocolate frosting that's in her hair. And she's blaming her little brother in the bassinet.

Now, we giggle at the humor of little ones caught in this act of duplicity. But as we mature, it's not so much, it's not so funny. And so I'm going to ask today, when am I most authentic? And what does the virtue of integrity mean to me? Rick and I have been giving a kind of litany each day almost of the wounds or the woes of our culture today.

The bigotry, the hatred, the racism, the wounds of war, the overstimulated greed and ego that cripples us. But perhaps the most distressing is the erosion of our capacity to recognize and to acknowledge the truth. From the highest office to the major media outlets, from thousands of bloggers to our own dining room tables, we've become irresponsible, manipulative and dishonest with the truth.

Denying it when it's inconvenient or bending it to suit our own purposes, labeling it as fake news, an alternative fact or misinformation. You know, studies from major scientific institutes and very prominent prestigious universities are often simply dismissed as yet just another opinion. We've confused what's a fact and what's not.

You know, in the third chapter of St. Mark's gospel, Jesus tells the crowd that every sin will be forgiven except the sin against the spirit. And what is that sin? Well, earlier in the gospel, Jesus said, Satan is the prince of lies. And so we speak of evil or Satan as the prince of lies.

So the sin is lying. And I say that because what Jesus seems to be saying is be careful about what you're doing. Putting this false spin on something because it's too awkward to accept as true.

The danger is that if you continue to do this, you'll eventually come to believe the lie that you're telling. And that's unforgivable. Not because God can't forgive, but because you feel that you have no need for forgiveness.

You don't want it. How can we possibly be a people of integrity if we can't tell the truth? That's why Father Rick and I have been focusing so strongly this week on reading the signs of the times. You know, the prophet Daniel in the Old Testament, in a third chapter speaks of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

The Babylonians had conquered Israel, and the king had constructed a golden statue. He wanted everybody, musicians and politicians and educators and business, he wanted everyone to worship his golden statue. Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego, three Jewish boys, refused to do so.

They were destined, therefore, to be in a white-hot furnace. And finally, Nebuchadnezzar is enraged when they refuse, and he questions them, will you not worship my idol? And they

say, whether our God can save us from the white-hot furnace is really not important, but we shall never worship your golden statue. Integrity was so important to them that it became the core.

Now, we dismiss it often as, well, they were foolish in the Old Testament, you know, worshipping golden statues, silliness. But I dare say, we're at a time now where we're worshipping our golden statues of the Dow Jones averages. We're worshipping our gods of the averages of, you know, Dow Jones and others, white nationalism.

We have lots of gods that we have made idols. Power, prestige, influence, money. I always say, what's the last thing you do before turning out the light and going to sleep at night? Is it prayer? Or is it checking the stock market? Take a look at your calendar and you'll see whether God is the one you worship or not.

Jesus said to his disciples, I have much more to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When he comes, being the spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth. Yesterday, Father Rick asked, you know, and spoke about those values that take root in our hearts.

And that's our invitation today. What's taking root in my heart now? I don't know if you're a person who likes the evening news, but I've enjoyed in the past a little segment at the very end of the programming. It's called Inspiring America.

After 25 or 28 minutes of, you know, natural disasters and wars and violence and hatred and terrible news, we get two or three minutes of positive news, good news. And I really enjoy it. There was one a couple of months ago, and it told a story of a group of little children, four-year-olds, all of them, and they had all been diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

But research was beginning to show that when these little ones were placed on a horse, for some reason, the child's physical strength and even cognitive abilities were more quickly enhanced than with traditional physical therapy or even prescription drugs. Now, whether it was the rhythmic gait of the horse or the contact with an animal, we're not sure. But another part of the story was that the horses were Mustangs that were trained by inmates of the Montana State Penitentiary.

And in a final clip, we see a room in the prison, very bleak, windowless. The walls are gray cinderblock. And a couple or several of the inmates are watching a small TV monitor, playing a video of these four-year-olds now on horses, giggling with absolute euphoria.

They're having a great time with their newfound strength, their dexterity, their control and motor skills development. They're just so happy and excited. And then they interview one of the inmates, one of the Mustang trainers.

Young guy, handsome young kid with tattoos everywhere, he's inked all up. And he says, I always thought this was a program about crippled kids. Now I realize it's a program about us crippled inmates.

I've been locked up for 11 years, he said. This is the first time I've experienced hope. I thought of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the famous physician and theologian and missionary to Africa.

One time he was giving a commencement address to a group of university graduates. And at the end he concluded by saying, I don't know what your destiny will be. What I do know is that the only one among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found out how to serve.

You know, we speak often of real presence. As I spoke the other day, how John's gospel has Jesus washing feet and serving. The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found out how to serve.

So thank you for your service. Thank you for being real presence. Thank you for revealing to our broken, wounded culture the golden road.

ATT, a phone company, years ago had an advertisement that I liked. It was, here's the scenario. It's a kitchen with a mom and a bunch of little kids.

And they're all running around making sandwiches for lunch and preparing for dinner. And all of a sudden the littlest one says, mama, can we go to the beach today? And the mama responds lovingly to her child saying, oh, sweetheart, no, I have a very important meeting with a very important client. And the little boy says, when do I get to be a client? We're hardwired for service.

We're hardwired, it's within our DNA to be people of integrity. To prioritize what's really important. And I think your presence this week at the Novena of Ascension thunders that acclamation to the world.

Our loving God will direct our lives.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.