

Is lying always wrong?



Question: We are told not to lie, but the Bible says Rahab the prostitute lied to protect the Jewish spies. The Bible later praises her as being justified for doing this. Does Scripture praise lying, which is a sin?

– **Tamarah E. Jones**, La Plata, Maryland

Answer: No. We should be careful to recall that the Bible records many things that are not praiseworthy. There are murders, rapes, theft, polygamy, adultery and the like. The mere reporting of these behaviors is not approval of them. In many cases, such behavior becomes an object lesson to illustrate what happens when such bad behavior ensues. In other cases, the sinful behavior simply goes unremarked. But silence is not the same as approval.

It is true that Rahab lied. Here is the account of it: “So the king of Jericho sent Rahab the order, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you and entered your house, for they have come to spy out the entire land.’ The woman had taken the two men and hidden them, so she said, ‘True, the men you speak of came to me, but I did not know where they came from. At dark, when it was time to close the gate, they left, and I do not know where they went’” (Jos 2:3-5).

The incident is simply recorded. And while the two Hebrew spies benefit from her lie and even promise her reward for her protection, there is no explicit praise in the text for the lie itself.

Later in the Scriptures there is praise of Rahab, but there is no mention of her lie, only her act of receiving the spies and sending them out by a protected way. Here are those texts: “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with the disobedient, for she had received the spies in peace” (Heb 11:31). “And in

the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by a different route?" (Jas 2:25).

Hence we should be careful not to say that the Scriptures affirm lying in this matter. There is a care in the sacred text to focus the praise on her overall benevolence, not the lie. St. Augustine affirms this stance: "That therefore which was rewarded in them was, not [her] deceit, but [her] benevolence; benignity of mind, not iniquity of lying" ("To Consentius, Against Lying," 32).

Novenas during Mass

Question: We have a weekly novena to St. Anne. Our pastor interrupts the Mass prayers with novena prayers. Is this against liturgical law? If it is, what can I do as a layperson to correct it?

– **Name withheld**, via email

Answer: This ought not be done. There are provisions for baptism, confirmation, matrimony, anointing of the sick and the Liturgy of the Hours to be incorporated into the Mass since they lead to or flow from the Eucharist.

There is, however, no such provision for devotions and novenas. The proper time for these is before or after Mass or separate from the Mass altogether. A priest might refer to or even read a prayer during the homily time, but more as a reference to the prayer than as an act of devotion per se.

The general norm is that something lesser should not eclipse something greater. The Mass is our highest act of worship. It needs no additions.

Speak gently to your pastor about your concern. This is likely a flourish of piety more than an intentional violation of liturgical norms. If he persists in the practice, a gentle

note to the diocese is an extended option.

Msgr. Charles Pope is the pastor of Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian in Washington, D.C., and writes for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., blog at blog.adw.org. Send questions to msgrpope@osv.com.