

Wise words from a successor of the apostles



In this week's In Focus (*online Oct. 15*), writer D.D. Emmons explores the lives and legacies of the Twelve Apostles – those chosen by Christ to learn his teachings and pass the Faith down through the generations.

Emmons writes: "Take away the apostles and it's unlikely that we would be Christians. ... It was these men who spread the message of Jesus, sharing the story of his resurrection to most of the known world in the first century. Following Pentecost, they had an unwavering commitment to Christ, even willing to suffer and give up their lives for him; in fact, most died as martyrs."

But the Church did not end with the deaths of the apostles. Their mission has been carried on throughout the centuries by their successors, the bishops. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains: "Just as the office which the Lord confided to Peter alone, as first of the apostles, destined to be transmitted to his successors, is a permanent one, so also endures the office, which the apostles received, of shepherding the Church, a charge destined to be exercised without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Hence the Church teaches that 'the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church, in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ'" (No. 862).

These days, it seems apparent that there are an awful lot of folks who despise the bishops. For a Church that should understand and appreciate authority in a very real and unique

way, we Catholics certainly reject it all too often.

Of course, the apostles themselves weren't perfect. Judas comes to mind as proof of that point, but so, too, do Peter and Paul and the rest of them. The same is true of our bishops today. As they try leading their people closer to Christ, they stumble and fall. But the overwhelming number of bishops are doing their best to listen to the Holy Spirit as they try to guide the Church. Most, certainly, are humble men, striving for holiness, who take seriously their responsibility to shepherd their flocks.

This is certainly true of Bishop David J. Bonnar of the Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio, who also serves as the editor of *The Priest* magazine, which is published by OSV. Like other bishops across the country, Bishop Bonnar at the beginning of the new school year mandated that masks were to be worn at all diocesan schools. As one can imagine, reaction to the mandate was mixed. Many were thankful for his decision; others were hostile.

I spoke to Bishop Bonnar recently about what led him to his decision.

"We just felt that this was the best way to proceed," Bishop Bonnar said. "And in this day and age, as a leader, no matter what decision you make, there's always going to be pushback. I'm heartened by the people who have responded affirming the decision, thanking us for taking these measures for the good of their children. There's a small, boisterous group, though, who are angry. We just need to keep reminding Catholics who are irritated by this that it really is for the common good."

Before he was installed as the sixth bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown in January, Bishop Bonnar chose as his episcopal motto "that all may be one." To get there, he said, "we have to redirect our eyes and our hearts to the Gospel and to the mission of Jesus, and what it means to be members of the body

of Christ. It's very tempting, given where the world is, to get caught up in agendas and ideologies; but at the same time, you have to strive every day to be brothers and sisters to each other. ... Unity does not always mean uniformity. It doesn't always mean that we agree with each other, but I think unity is that we respect each other, and that we know we belong to each other. I think some of these mask battles have just been so much laced with anger and venom; that's so counterproductive. We're people of faith, hope and love. And we need to hold on to those virtues, especially now."

Wise words from one of our truly good shepherds – and a successor of the apostles.

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