

Reflection Friday Lent 1 – 2021

Fr. Richard Rohr says, *“Integrity largely has to do with purifying our intentions and being honest about our motives.”* This sounds easy enough until trying to put it into practice when it raises all sorts of questions and challenges.

Pope Francis: *Given - and this is the fundamental thing - that God's mercy has no limits, if God is approached with a sincere and repentant heart, the question for those who do not believe in God is to abide by their own conscience. There is sin, also for those who have no faith, in going against one's conscience. Listening to it and abiding by it means making up one's mind about what is good and evil. Integrity involves listening to one's conscience and abiding by it!*

The Gospel calls individual Christians to live lives of honesty, integrity and concern for the common good, to create circles of integrity, networks of solidarity which can expand to embrace and transform society by their prophetic witness.

There was a Chinese Emperor who, having no children, wanted to find a successor. Thousands of children came to the palace to learn that the Emperor was going to choose one of them as heir. He gave them all a seed and told them to go home, plant the seed in a pot and tend it for a year. In a year's time, the Emperor would judge their efforts and choose his successor. One boy named Ling received his seed and returned to his village. His mother helped him choose a pot and plant his seed. Ling watered his pot every day. Once a week, the children of the village would compare their plants. After a few weeks, there were signs of life in all but Ling's pot. The weeks passed and Ling continued to water his pot every day. After a few months, the pots really came to life. Some had trees, some flowers and some leafy shrubs. Poor Ling still had nothing growing in his pot, and the other children made fun of him. Ling continued to water his pot every day.

After a year they all returned to the palace to see who would be the heir. Ling was worried. *“What if they punish me? They won't know I watered it every day, they'll think I'm lazy.”* His mother looked him in the eye and explained that whatever the consequences were, he had to return and show the Emperor his barren pot. Ling and the other children entered the palace. By now, some of the plants were looking magnificent and the children were wondering which one the Emperor would choose. Ling was embarrassed as other children looked at his lifeless pot and scoffed.

The Emperor came out and looked at the many impressive trees, shrubs and flowers on display. When the Emperor came to Ling. He looked at the pot then he looked at Ling. *“What happened here?”* He asked. *“I watered the pot every day, but nothing ever grew.”* Ling muttered nervously.

After a few hours, the Emperor stood in front of the children and congratulated them on their efforts. *“Clearly, some of you desperately want to be Emperor and would do anything to make that happen, but there is one boy that I would like to point out as he has come to me with nothing. Ling, come here please.”* *“Oh no,”* thought Ling. He slowly walked to the front holding his barren pot.

The Emperor held up the pot for all to see and the other children laughed. Then the Emperor continued, *“A year ago, I gave you all a seed. I told you to go away, plant the seed and return with your plant. The seeds that I gave you all were boiled until they were no longer viable and wouldn't grow, but I see before me thousands of plants and only one barren pot. Integrity and courage are more important values for leadership than proud displays, so Ling will be my heir.”*