

Happy Monday to all,

On this day, August 11, in 1984, then President Ronald Reagan was preparing for his weekly live broadcast. The engineers asked Reagan to make a pre-broadcast mic check. He obliged, jokingly speaking into the microphone, “My fellow Americans, I’m pleased to tell you today that I’ve signed legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes.”

His flippant remark soon leaked out to the media. It turned what Reagan intended to be a harmless private joke into an international embarrassment, precipitating dismay among America’s allies and providing fuel for Soviet propaganda. Foreign newspapers and news services declared that his comments were “totally unbecoming” for a world leader...especially the U.S. president.

Catholic Social Teaching recognizes the profound power of words. Words are capable of both building up and tearing down. Words carry spiritual weight, influencing individuals, relationships, and society. Words are to be used with intention and responsibility, recognizing their potential to promote truth, justice, and charity, or conversely, to spread falsehood, injustice, hate and division.

Violence often starts with words — words of hatred that spread intolerance, divide societies, and promote and endorse discrimination. We can strongly disagree with the actions and personal positions of another, but our words should never be directed toward the individual or reflect a manner of demeaning the value or dignity of a person’s worth. The power of our words should lead to redemption, not condemnation.

There is no need to divide families, lose friends, and break off relationships based on one’s perspective on the importance of equality, fairness, care for “the other”, and protection from social harm versus the importance of loyalty, national defense, patriotism, respect for authority and moral purity.

Catholic Social Teaching calls us to speak words as if they were seeds designed to grow into tenderness, compassion, healing, and peace. We must bring to wherever we go- and to the people we encounter – words conveying the good news that we hold in our hearts.

Catholic Charities serves as the arm of charity and justice for our diocese. We do not embrace words or titles reflective of social, political or economic status. We base our mission, our vision, on Catholic Social Teaching alone. Our services and resources are designed to feed those who are hungry and thirsty, strangers to our area in need of establishing a new life among us, those who do not have sufficient resources necessary to thrive, those who are ill or disabled, and those who find themselves imprisoned physically, chemically or psychologically.

Words, like blades and hammers, are resources used to create or destroy. History will have to decide whether President Reagan’s “mic check” parody was good-natured frivolity or an unfortunate misuse of the power of words.

However...in all fairness...on August 11, 41 years ago, President Ronald Reagan said in his actual “on-air” weekly live broadcast the following words...

“My fellow Americans, I’m pleased to tell you that today I signed legislation that will allow student religious groups to begin enjoying a right they’ve too long been denied: the freedom to meet in public high schools during non-school hours, just as other student groups are allowed to do.”

Wonderful words, Mr. President!

*"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."* (Matthew 12:36-37)

Blessings

Deacon Mike