



Rector's Essay

Growth with Integrity

By Jarrett Kerbel (09/11/26)

The word integrity shares a Latin root with “integer” and “integral,” and signifies “wholeness,” “completeness” and “undefiled.” Under the power of God’s grace, our souls are always reaching new levels of integrity, which is to say the wholeness that comes when our contradictions are resolved into a unified character.

Maturation involves growth in self-awareness. As reflection on experience reveals the gifts and flaws, the shadow and light, the sin and the grace, and the tangle of conflicting desires that we all carry in our fragmented souls, we begin to long for simplicity instead. Kierkegaard famously said, “Salvation is to will one thing.” In other words, salvation is deliverance from the welter of contradictory thoughts and impulses that immiserate us.

God’s love brings inner healing. As God’s love draws us in closer and closer to reunion with God, our inner life is also brought into harmony and serenity through our growth in integrity. Under the healing power of God’s grace and love, the quicksand of ambiguous values and commitments becomes the firm ground of clear virtues and grounded character that is well formed and ready to respond to the world from a deep place of connection with God’s will.

What is true for individuals is also true for institutions. Some dismiss institutions, but I believe in them. As Karl Popper said, “Just as we need a lever to magnify the strength of an individual, so we need institutions to magnify the strength of individuals to accomplish important tasks.” Over time, institutions that prioritize self-reflection and discernment become self-aware. They begin to understand their gifts, their weaknesses, their character, their character flaws, their virtues and their vices.

One thing that always rubs me the wrong way is an institution pretending to be something it is not. A church pretending to be a social club, or pretending it does not really believe what it says it believes, is a prime example for me. This lack of clarity and ambiguity looks to me like a lack of integrity.

One of my favorite authors on business management taught me the importance of identifying the core and aspirational values of any organization. Core values are observable in the manifest actions and organizational style of an entity. Aspirational values are the desired values that pull the organization toward greater integrity in the future.

At my Philadelphia church, one core value was “Learning leads to God.” I often wonder what the core values are at St. Johns and the aspirational values. What I do know, is that by identifying core and aspirational values we will collaborate with God on the path of grace that leads to greater integrity, and greater clarity in God’s service.

-Jarrett