Justice and Unfounded Accusations

Ah, the rumor mill. If we could get a patent on the rumor mill, Catholic Charities wouldn’t have to hold fundraisers to help sustain and expand our services. (And thank you to all those who attended and supported our first “A Movable Feast.”) Think about all the rumors we’ve heard or passed along, many times secretly questioning whether it could be true, but it sure seemed like a good enough story to share. There is not much of a fine line between rumors and propaganda. From the somewhat harmless rumor 50 years ago that Paul McCartney was dead because the Abbey Road album cover showed him not wearing shoes to the poisonous unreliability of rumors. In moments of weakness we can all be taken in by rumors. We can hear them and, even though incredible, still believe them. But we need not pass them over the internet, or poison the well in the workplace. We need not become the modern day lynch mob of the fictional victim in To Kill a Mockingbird, or successors to the real life criminals who killed Emmett Till.

When we hear about uncharacteristic behavior, or sensationalistic stories about other religions’ beliefs, we don’t have to hide behind the attractive but lazy impulse to generalize to the negative, e.g., “All (fill in your own slur),” as justification for passing on a destructive but unsupported conclusion or rumor.

In our lives and programs, in moments of triumph and success, but especially in moments of weariness and vulnerability, we are served God’s people with compassion, dignity and respect.”

These creatures have no voice to tell us what is happening to their habitat.

When the Dependable Well Goes Dry...

In the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in northern New Mexico, where my immediate family owns 600 acres of the 1,000-acre ranch that has been in the family since the 1840s, water has never been an issue. There was always enough — until now. Although the hills, rising to an elevation of almost 9,000 feet above sea level, are classified as high desert, the land has been suitable for dry land farming, grazing and lumbering the vast ponderosa pine forests stretching like a giant green carpet to the peaks of the Pecos Wilderness.

My paternal grandfather, Octaviano Sandoval, at one time had 1,000 sheep and other livestock. My maternal grandfather, Enrique Perea, grazed cattle on the adjoining ranch in the same valley. They also cultivated corn, wheat and oats and had orchards and big gardens. Their hand-dug wells always had enough water for their families, livestock, fowl and wildlife. In time of drought, some of the wells, dug by hand and not more than 20 feet deep, dried up but were always eventually replenished by rain and snowfall. But there was one well that never dried up, and it was always their security that their way of life could continue.

Until recently the cattle rancher who leased the land had enough water from that well to sustain his 20 to 30 head of cattle. But now that well, which for about seven decades had never failed, has gone dry.

Is it an effect of climate change and global warming? We suspect it may be.

Recently, at the meeting of the board of directors of the family corporation that owns the land, we learned other wells are going dry too. A neighbor who recently built a beautiful home on land east of us had to go 500 feet deep to find water, but the well was producing only five gallons a minute. Now he and his family are getting only two gallons a minute, and that water has a brackish taste.

Also, our cousins on several hundred acres of land west of us drilled three wells and came up empty. Ernie Diaz, manager of the Sandoval Corporation, reported that on one well, the water table went down 10 feet from one year to the next. The problem affects not only the few families that live here but an amazing variety of wildlife. Our land is home to deer, elk, bears, foxes, wild turkeys, bobcats, mountain lions, and of course the ubiquitous squirrels, rabbits, hares, coyotes, moles and birds in infinite variety. These creatures have no voice to tell us what is happening to their habitat.

If they could speak, they would be on the streets with the millions of young people all around the world demanding that global warming before it is too late. The adult response ranges from unbelief to slow; perhaps we cannot imagine an end to the bounty we are accustomed to.

Years ago, on a cruise to Alaska with family members, we experienced a dramatic demonstration of global warming in Glacier Bay northwest of Juneau. Every half hour or so, a big chunk of a giant glacier would break off and fall into the bay with a resounding crash. Though awe-inspiring, its effects on our lives seemed remote.

We can no longer assume that. The effects of global warming may already be here. In a news conference in 2015, Pope Francis quoted a farmer who told him: “God always forgives; we men sometimes forgive, but nature never forgives.” If you give her a slap, she will give you one. I believe that we have overly exploited nature.”

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

— The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

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