

On one of my first trips to a carnival, I was excited at the prospect of winning seemingly a big prize at one of the games. It was the summer of 1985, and I was with my friend Andy and his parents, and I can't quite remember the game we were playing, but I do remember how he laughed at the prize I won - a piece of plastic resembling a watch with a pasted on watch face that said A&W for the root beer. And to this day I can still hear the carny's voice, "it's always the right time for the cool, crisp taste of A&W."

Well, I still will have an A&W on occasion, but all of us have to deal with the "fine print" if you will; the catch. This is understandable when we have a deal that looks too good to be true, or a sweepstakes entry, or of course a person from a third world country sending us an email that we are set to inherit several million dollars we just need to provide some information to them. But what about the difference that honesty and integrity can make as a way of life? For truth be told, sometimes we are the one with asterisk next to what we say. But truthfulness can have so many benefits for ourselves and one another.

Consider a few of the following examples:

Monty Roberts grew up around horses in California. His father was a horse trainer and Monty was riding before he learned to walk. This was during the heyday of Western Movies and as a child Monty rode horses in movies, often as a stunt double for child actors. He later got into rodeos and horse shows and earned a reputation as a great horseman.

Roberts always dreamed of being a horse trainer himself, and with a wife and a couple of kids to support he figured it was time to get serious, so he went into the business. In spite of his reputation as a great rider, Roberts was an inexperienced trainer, and had trouble getting clients. He had only 4 horses to train which wasn't bringing in nearly enough money to support his family.

Roberts wasn't sure what he was going to do when an opportunity was presented to work as an apprentice with Don Dodge, one of the most well-known and well-respected trainers in the area. He was told to bring two of his horses with him.

After 10 weeks the apprenticeship ended and Roberts met with Dodge. One of the horses he had brought with him was named Panama Buck. Dodge told Roberts that when he got home he should call up the horse's owner, Lawson Williams, and tell him that he was wasting his money having Roberts train the horse because the horse was never going to amount to anything as a racehorse.

Roberts was understandably reluctant to do this, as that would eliminate a quarter of his already meager income. When he asked Dodge why he should do this, Dodge responded that the most important thing he could do was always tell owners the truth about their horses, and if he did this he would soon get more than enough business to replace the loss.

Roberts went home and did as instructed but Williams didn't take the news well. He responded by berating Roberts, screaming "You useless son of a gun, you wouldn't know a good horse if it leapt up between your legs. That's the last horse you'll ever get from me!"

Several days later Roberts' phone rang. A voice on the other end said, "Hello, Mr. Gray here, Joe Gray." He went on, "I was having lunch with Mr.

Williams yesterday. He was complaining about you, but from what I heard you must be about the only honest trainer I ever heard of. Well, I know that Panama Buck horse of his wasn't any good, and I just want to take a flyer on you. I have this horse I want to send to you; it's called My Blue Heaven."

From that point on things started to turn around for Roberts. He gained a reputation as not only a great trainer, but an honest one, and soon he had more than enough horses to train. Eventually he would even have the opportunity to train horses for the Queen of England. And it all started with following some wise advice from a mentor to always be honest, even when the price is high.

From more recent times, there's Andy Roddick the tennis player.

In May of 2005 American professional tennis player Andy Roddick was playing Fernando Verdasco, of Spain, in the round of 16 at the Italia Masters tennis tournament in Rome, Italy. Roddick was the number one seed in the tournament and a heavy favorite to win the match and advance.

Roddick, one of the top players in the world, was at the top of his game. Indeed, just one month later he would make it to the finals at Wimbledon before losing to Roger Federer.

Roddick dominated as expected and had triple match point when something extremely unusual happened. Roddick couldn't return Verdasco's hard second serve but the linesman called the serve out and awarded Roddick the point and the match.

With the crowd cheering Verdasco ran to the net to shake Roddick's hand and congratulate him on his victory. However, Roddick knew something that the linesman, the umpire, the cheering crowd, and Verdasco himself didn't know. The serve had not been out, but had hit on the line, making it in.

Roddick could have kept this information to himself and accepted the victory. Indeed, honor calls are not expected in tennis. Instead he informed the umpire that the ball had been in and offered to show him the mark on the clay where the ball had hit to prove his point. The umpire reversed the call and awarded the point to Verdasco.

Having been given a second chance Verdasco made the most of it. He came back to win the game, the set, and the match giving him a highly improbable victory, especially considering not long before he had been standing at the net ready to concede.

Sportswriter Frank DeFord estimates Roddick's honesty cost him at least "tens of thousands of dollars;" perhaps much more if he had gone on to win the tournament. Integrity was clearly more important to Roddick than either winning or money. Andy Roddick lost a tennis match that day but won something much more important, and in the process set a great example of sportsmanship for competitors everywhere.

And then there's Saint John of Kanty.

One day the holy priest St. John of Kanty was walking down a country road when he was stopped by robbers; they took the money in his bag and demanded to know whether he had any more. John said no, and the robbers departed. Immediately after this, however, John remembered that he had some coins sewn into his cloak, so he hurried after the highwaymen, caught up with them, and, apologizing for his error, handed

over the additional coins. The robbers were so amazed by his honesty that they returned everything they had taken from him.

It would be nice if that were the norm, but more common is the twisting of the truth. Sometimes there are out and out lies. But more common are the half-truths or the twisting of reality. For instance there's the story about a senior prelate being asked out of the blue at a press conference: "Your Eminence, what do you think of the local night clubs?" Whereupon, taken aback, he replied: "I don't know. I've never been to a night club." The next day the newspaper headline ran: "Cardinal denies visiting local night clubs." In one sense the headline was true, but it was untruthful too in terms of what it implied. The facts were manipulated. Sometimes media outlets do this; very often we as humans do this.

Fake news though is nothing new. And the Gospel today gives us a good example of just that. Two groups of people use a clever question to try to paint Jesus into a corner and get Him to say things that could then be manipulated and used against Him.

The Pharisees join with the Herodians, who are their typical opponents to try to get Jesus. The Pharisees were very much into strict Jewish observance, so if Jesus were to say “pay the tax”, then they would say He isn’t loyal to His own people who hope for independence from Rome one day. The Herodians are supporters of the dynasty of Herod the Great and are allied with his living sons who divided up Judea for themselves under the sovereignty of the Roman empire; they have no qualms paying the tax, and if Jesus said “do not pay the tax” they could accuse Him of being a rebel wanting to threaten the power of Rome.

Notice how they come up to Jesus as a wolf in sheep’s clothing: “Teacher, we know that you are true, and truthfully teach the way of God.” They are trying to appear sincere; but they are not at all concerned about growing in virtue. They are trying to destroy Jesus. Jesus, though, sees to the heart.

The 7th and 8th Commandments which forbid stealing and bearing false witness remind us that honesty needs to be a part of our lives. And the thing with deception and lying is they can kind of creep into our lives subtly and really impact our relationships. So how can we grow in honesty?



Well, first, one might ask can you ever lie? And I think there may be some unique situations. For instance in my first year of priesthood, I was invited to dinner at a home with the other priest. The man doing the grilling said “hey we have three kinds of fish father I’m grilling which one do you like?” Truthfully, I don’t really like *any* grilled fish; I enjoy a good fish fry and breaded cod or walleye. And for dessert was key lime pie; loved by many, even the subject of entire good country song by Kenny Chesney, but I much prefer anything with chocolate. Well in this situation I’m not going to say “I really appreciate that but you know I’ll be back in 10 minutes I’m going to grab a Big Mac and swing by DQ and then join you.” Sometimes it’s best not to hurt someone’s feelings. But more often than not, we might look for an excuse to manipulate or to lie a bit so as to avoid being uncomfortable, or to kick the can down the road, and as I said this can become something that is something we may not even think about as we do it. But cultivating honesty is a great way for growing in virtue. And I think a few practical things can help.

First is to catch ourselves when we do it. White lies we can be dismissive of; but they can build up over time. If we stretch the truth, even if we try to make someone feel better, it can pose long term problems. Say someone

is trying to become better at something; if we told them all the time they were great and there were no flaws they'd never improve. And we also might find over time our relationship doesn't improve as it should because over time the person may not fully believe us, or we may be seen as fake.

Second, it's always best to try to be straight. This is one of the things I've struggled with myself. Sometimes we beat around the bush, or ask things to try to get to the truth hoping maybe the person picks up on what we are trying to say. Many of us have experienced this in our relationships with others, and it adds tension. Being direct and saying what is on our minds or what needs to be said is a big help to having a fuller more fruitful relationship with others. This is especially true with those closest to us; if we really love someone, why are we hiding something? People love us and care about us, so when something is on our minds our troubling us, or we have a concern about something in their life, it's always best to try to get to the point directly.

Third, we always want to be on guard against gossip. Sometimes gossip can be relatively harmless; and sometimes we have to vent about someone we are frustrated with. But sadly gossip can take on a life of it's own; it's a

big part of the Passion story when people lie about what Jesus has said and done at his show-trial. We always need to be aware things can easily be passed on and taken out of context, especially by children, and to our social media rants and postings.

Fourth, we can untangle a web of lies by putting a stop to it. Sometimes we get caught. And much like a Ponzi Scheme where you keep getting investors to cover yourself to buy time, lies can just snowball and get worse and worse. But maybe you did screw up and lied to someone or were manipulative. They might not like what happened, but they'll certainly respect us more for owning up to something. It takes guts and courage, but it also can do so much to save a friendship or relationship. This is what Zacchaeus did; owning up to stealing from people and paying back what he had taken and turning his life around.

Fifth, we can treat others with justice. The fourteenth-century nobleman St. Conrad of Piacenza was out hunting one day and ordered his attendants to flush out game by setting a fire. Unfortunately, a sudden wind carried the fire and from there it spread to the neighboring villages. Unable to extinguish the fire, Conrad and his attendants returned home, but a poor

man gathering firewood was blamed for the disaster and sentenced to death. Learning of this, Conrad was filled with remorse and publicly admitted his responsibility. He was ordered to pay restitution for all the damage, which took virtually everything he owned, plus his wife's dowry. Accepting this as a sign from God, the two of them gave away the remainder of their estate. Sometimes others are wrongfully accused of something, and by owning up to it we make sure that others don't take the blame for what we did.

Sixth, we can cultivate honesty in our finances. Saint Francis de Sales said "Always be impartial and just in your deeds. Put yourself in your neighbor's place, and then you will judge fairly. When you buy, act as though you were the seller, and when you sell, act as though you were the buyer, and you will buy and sell with justice." A simple action like returning money if you were undercharged for something at the store, or letting someone know if they are underpaying you for something you are selling them can do a lot. We'll unlock God's blessings and also find inner peace.

And lastly, can we be honest with ourselves? Sometimes we deceive ourselves and say things like well just this once, it's no big deal, or we

never take the time to examine our conscience and ask ourselves tough questions like how we are treating people, or what we maybe could have done better in the day that past. We want to celebrate what we do well, but also be mindful that we are always trying to grow too.

A good friend of mine over the years has developed a great ability to detect some subtle changes in my facial expression whenever I'm not quite being honest about something on my mind; and when caught, we always have a good laugh. And truthfully part of the value of our friendship is how we can both tell it like it is with one another; shoot the breeze, enjoy some sports or lighthearted talk, but also challenge when we are worried or concerned about something. It's a liberating feeling to truly just be yourself. But it's also a great practice in life, being a witness to the truth. Honesty does so much to cultivate better relationships and feelings, and helps both us and the people in our lives grow.

I can't say it's always the right time for an A&W, but it is always the right time for honesty with God, ourselves and one another. May it be something we strive to grow in day by day as we strive to become saints.

