

## Monastic Scribe 104 – May 15, 2026

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

When we were kids, a favorite saying went this way, “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me!” If that was ever true, it certainly is not true now. Words have the power to hurt. Violence begins in the mind, in how we think of others; it is expressed in the words on our mouths, and finally find expression in deeds and actions.

Our society has lost a common set of values, a way to live good human lives. We look for ways to make a difference but often miss the fundamentals of human living. Many people are confused and bewildered. What can we do? I believe we can start at the local, personal level. Pay attention to your own values and your own life style. As I wrote above, this means paying attention to how I think, how I speak and then how I act. Some people, good people at that, react with anger when they hear another religious person speaking what they think is wrong, is immoral, is heresy. They start yelling at them. This is a failure to listen to what is being said, to respect the other person if he/she seems to be wrong.

The gift of Pope Francis was to restore the Synodal way of speaking and acting. We need to listen to another, to perhaps take a time of silence after hearing them, and only then offer our own opinions gently and respectfully. In line with listening is our willingness not to judge another person. Don't categorize another. Don't call them names or put them in a box. This doesn't necessarily mean we agree with that person but we accept their right to speak as they wish before we offer our own view.

One value that has been largely lost in our culture is concern for the common good. Americans have put emphasis on individual rights. These are important but living in a society may mean some curtailment of individual rights. Cameron Trimble sums this problem up by saying we pride ourselves as being separate, independent, self-made people. As Frank Sinatra used to sing, “I'll do it my way.” But Cameron also says that the illusion of separateness is a great spiritual crisis. The concern for the common good has been a basic religious value that has fallen into neglect.

The covenant made with Jews in the Old Testament was made with a people and not just individuals. They were to recognize the rights and needs of strangers and resident aliens as well as their own people. Catholic Baptism is also the entrance

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to being a people with common beliefs, common rituals, common regulations. But American individualism and our displeasure with authorities and institutions has affected many Christians in their belief that they can determine their own religious code, creed, and cult. Of course we can disagree and work to change some practices and that is why the synodal path is so important. Likewise, it does not mean one religious group can enforce its ways and beliefs on all citizens. The current movement to promote a “Christian nationalism” is more of a political strategy than a spiritual one.

The choice to be “spiritual but not religious” can be a way to go one’s individual way, the way that appeal to me when I don’t like the common way. The intent may be good and an individual may choose traditional and well proven spiritual ways but the tendency to choose the comfortable path is also a real possibility. Most people need a spiritual community to share, from which to learn and clarify one’s beliefs, in which one is challenged. I have believed that we need two groups. First a large congregation where we share with people who are different than ourselves and yet share a common way. But, secondly, we may need an intimate group to honestly discuss and pray about what is going on in our lives.

Indifference and passivity go along with individualism. It requires some effort to get involved, to read and study the history and traditions of our religious affiliations. We are talking about the importance of having meaning to our lives. We are also concerned with our need to belong, a place of community. We are challenged to overcome our reticence, our fears and vulnerabilities and listen to people who may have different views than our own. In other words, we are called to grow as mature human beings.

The alternative to being people of values, of community, of commitment, is to complain, to live in fear and isolation. We do have choices. I hope some of you have had some good experiences in choosing what is important in life. I am still searching, still choosing, still learning. The more I learn, the more I realize how little I know. Do you feel that way too? I am at: [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org).

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.