

“A prophet is not dishonored except in his native country and among his own kin and in his household” (Mark 6:4, Hart’s translation).

Prophets are not dishonored for predicting the future. Prophets are martyred for rattling the cages of the powerful who profit from exploiting their privileges.

On July 6, 1415, Jan Hus was burned at the stake. Hus hoped his incendiary preaching and heated rebukes would purify an embattled church, but the flames consumed him first.

Though promised safe conduct to and from the Council of Constance, Hus was arrested upon arrival. He spent eight days in a church official’s house before being transferred to a stinking cell in the Dominican monastery on an island in Lake Constance. Conditions were so bad Hus nearly died.

The cathedral in Constance was packed, standing room only for Hus’ sham trial. Cardinals with red hats and bishops wearing miters sat in a semi-circle around a dying man whose chained, emaciated hands were clutched together. Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund occupied the imperial throne in full regalia.

Hus became well known in 1402 when he was appointed preacher in Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, a church founded in 1391 to promote preaching in the common language. This was the time of the Great Schism (1378-1417) in the church with at first two and later three rival popes, each with his own following, each with his own Sacred College of Cardinals, and each with his own administrative offices.

Hus saw himself as a passionate reformer. In 1405 he denounced alleged appearances of Christ’s blood on communion wafers as an elaborate hoax. He ridiculed the power some priests claimed for themselves when they declared to their parishioners, “We can give you the Holy Ghost or send you to hell.”

Hus’ rhetoric was incendiary: “These priests deserve hanging in hell, for they are fornicators, parasites, money misers, and fat swine.” He condemned Prague’s wealthiest clergy for charging steep fees for administering sacraments and for taking multiple paid positions without fully serving any.

Archbishop Zbyněk attempted to silence Hus. Hus accosted the archbishop: “How is it that fornicating and otherwise criminal priests walk about freely, while humble priests are jailed as heretics and suffer exile for the very proclamation of the Gospel?”

This was too much for church officials. Spies were placed in Bethlehem Chapel to report on Hus' preaching. When Hus spotted one of them, he shouted in mid-sermon, "Hey, you in the hood, make a note of this, you sneak, and carry it to the archbishop's residence." Hus condemned the practice of selling indulgences. Zbyněk excommunicated Hus.

At his trial Hus was refused an opportunity to defend his ideas or reply to specific charges. Attempts to argue his case resulted in shouts from the judges that Hus was arrogant and stubborn.

The emperor, who guaranteed Hus' safety, changed his mind. It was more politically expedient for him to agree that Hus was the greatest heretic ever to arise in Christendom and therefore deserved no protection.

Thirty charges were brought against Hus—one that Hus taught he was the fourth person in the Godhead! He rejected all the charges and refused to recant. The council sentenced him to death. Hus told his friend Jan of Chlum that he preferred to be burned publicly rather than silenced in private "in order that all Christendom might know what I said in the end."

Hus was defrocked and cursed: "We commit your soul to the Devil." He was bound to the stake with a sooty chain wrapped around his neck, wood piled to his chin. The signal was given. The executioner set the pyre ablaze.

The beat goes on, absent the pyre. Roman Catholic Bishops in the US want to exclude from the Eucharist people who do not support their view of abortion. Garry Wills, emeritus professor of history at Northwestern, a life-long Catholic, author of over fifty books, shows how this new cult of the fetus was not observed in the long history of the bishop's church.

The Catholic Church no longer claims that its opposition to abortion is scriptural. It is not a religious issue. Catholic theologian Bernard Häring points out that at least half of the fertilized eggs fail to achieve "nidation"—adherence to the uterus—making nature and nature's God guilty of a greater "holocaust" of unborn babies than abortion accounts for, if the fertilized ovum is a baby. Wills conclusion: "This, of course, does not affect the American bishops. They hate this pope and this president anyway."

As Hus learned, as Wills knows, reason is not persuasive when the problem is not intellectual but emotional. This is as true of our civic life as it is of our religious life.

Ed McBroom, a dairy farmer, director of his church choir, conservative Republican State Senator in Michigan, released a report detailing an eight-month-long investigation into the legitimacy of the 2020 election.

The conclusion: “There is no evidence presented at this time to prove either significant acts of fraud or that an organized, wide-scale effort to commit fraudulent activity was perpetrated in order to subvert the will of Michigan voters.”

The people who have bought milk from Ed for years, who attend church with him, who are his neighbors, accuse him of being paid off by the Chinese. He and his family now live with death threats. Some of his neighbors believe it is time for another civil war.

You may have heard of a group calling themselves “Concerned Moravians.” At a gathering on June 26, a call to action was issued because the Moravian Church, in their view, has gone astray in relation to homosexuality and racism. They believe the gospel is being corrupted and that the church is in serious and immediate danger.

The collapse of trust and the rise of animosity, whether in our civic life or church life, is an emotional not intellectual problem. If we are, as David Brooks writes, to help people learn to feel the proper kind of outrage at injustice, the proper form of reverence before sacrifice, the proper affection for our neighbors, then we need to educate the passions.

We do that by telling stories. This is what Jesus did. In an attempt at self-justification a lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells the story we know as the Good Samaritan. No one who heard that story would call a Samaritan “good.” But it is the Samaritan, the poor black man, the gay man, not the priest or Levite, who binds the wounds of the one stripped, beaten, and left half dead by the side of the road.

Why? Because it is the Samaritan who knows what it feels like to be despised, rejected, beaten and left for dead. Until we have an emotional connection with “the other,” we will continue to walk on by.

The Council of Constance refused to hear Jan Hus’ story. On December 17, 1415, Pope John Paul II told an international symposium, “Today, I feel the need to express deep regret for the cruel death inflicted on Jan Hus.” The Pope commended Hus’ “moral courage in the face of adversity and death.”

In a letter to his congregation written two weeks before his death Hus included this prayer: “Give us a courageous spirit, a fearless heart, the right faith, a firm hope, and perfect love, that we may offer our lives for your sake with the greatest patience and joy.”