

## **Facing the future**

I was asked one day to identify the trait that makes it possible to face affliction with calm assurance. I felt that the questioner gave me too much credit to believe that I would know the answer to so penetrating a question; but while I claim no inspiration I pondered that question for a day or two, and after listening to a talk given by David A. Bednar\*, I believe that the answer may have something to do with how we face our vicissitudes. When trouble comes, where do we look? Do we allow our bodies to take control and foster the seeds of self-pity, self doubt, and fault finding, or do we look outward, count our blessings, and discover ways that we can be of service to others—even to those who speak out against us—and respond to their needs despite our own hardships.

I told him this: if your opponent was a man of integrity whose heart is honest, your innate sensitivity and spirituality will enable you to discern his needs and resolve issues lovingly. If not, it may take sterner measures. It is rare indeed to find any kind of managerial role that does not require a rhinoceros hide to cover a soft heart. That, in fact, is the very thing that the truancy intervention proposal did for me. It gave me a way to administer ‘tough love’ with a soft voice and caring heart.

My early experiences as an assistant principal were not going particularly well when I was advised that Molonai Hola, then an aggressive 7<sup>th</sup> grader, had ‘beat up’ a fellow student. While I do not remember the first interview I had with him, he has since pointed to it as a turning point in his life. Beginning then, he told me, he discovered that his fists need not be the answer to every perceived threat; and his later election as studentbody president is evidence that he learned the power of management by love.

I well remember the time that Molonai was coming down ‘B’ hall on the first day of school with his ‘court followers’ surrounding him. I was a bit surprised when he motioned his followers to stand back while he attended to a tearful 7<sup>th</sup> grade boy who was cowering in fear in a door-well. After calming the frightened student’s fears he personally escorted the boy to the class that he could not find. He had found a friend for life, and an ardent admirer among those who were watching—among them, the assistant principal.

Not that he failed to face situations squarely. I well remember coming out of a faculty meeting long after school was out, to find Molonai holding one of the school toughs by the shirt front about one foot off the ground against the lockers, and talking to him eyeball to eyeball. Once he had

released the boy I asked him what that was all about, and he said “He needed to learn that you don’t torment 7<sup>th</sup> graders.”

After our pivotal first interview he often dropped into the office just to ‘chew the fat’, seeking counsel of one kind or another; and once he became studentbody president our friendship paid big dividends; for he began dropping in to ask “what can I do for you”. Invariably I would have a stink-bomb outbreak or some other seemingly unsolvable problem on my hands; which problem would always immediately disappear without my ever learning who the culprit was.

But enough of examples from my own experience. Jesus Christ, our exemplar, experienced more opposition, and suffered much more, than the combined afflictions that Robert Fitt ever suffered multiplied by thousands. He was hated, despised and persecuted. What for? For doing good. The most powerful leaders turned a deaf-ear to his situation; and even many of his closest associates turned against him. Yet he never caved-in, and he never turned his eye inward toward the subtle twin traps of self-doubt and self-pity. Instead, he was always thinking of others. In the moment of his own excruciating crucifixion, for example, he met the needs of his mother, and of a repentant thief, rather than wallowing in his own afflictions. Perhaps we could look to him for example. Not that he did not handle ‘tough love’ issues by speaking the truth in love—he did that too—often forcefully.

It was always so with him; and, by extension, perhaps the inner peace that he gleaned in his times of trial can also come to us—if we are wise enough, and courageous enough, to follow his noble example.

It is obvious to me that there are many who have not fully recovered from the trauma of their most recent experience and so they may not be ready to face challenges in the ways that I suggest. (For remember: my advice is worth exactly as much as it costs you.) But this much I know. As sons and daughters of God, we are destined for greatness if we will but listen to the Lord; and the Lord will never let us down. He will always sustain those who follow the whisperings of the Holy Spirit.