



Learning from Jesus the Communicator

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A large, semi-transparent image of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican, showing its iconic dome and facade, serves as the background for the right side of the slide.

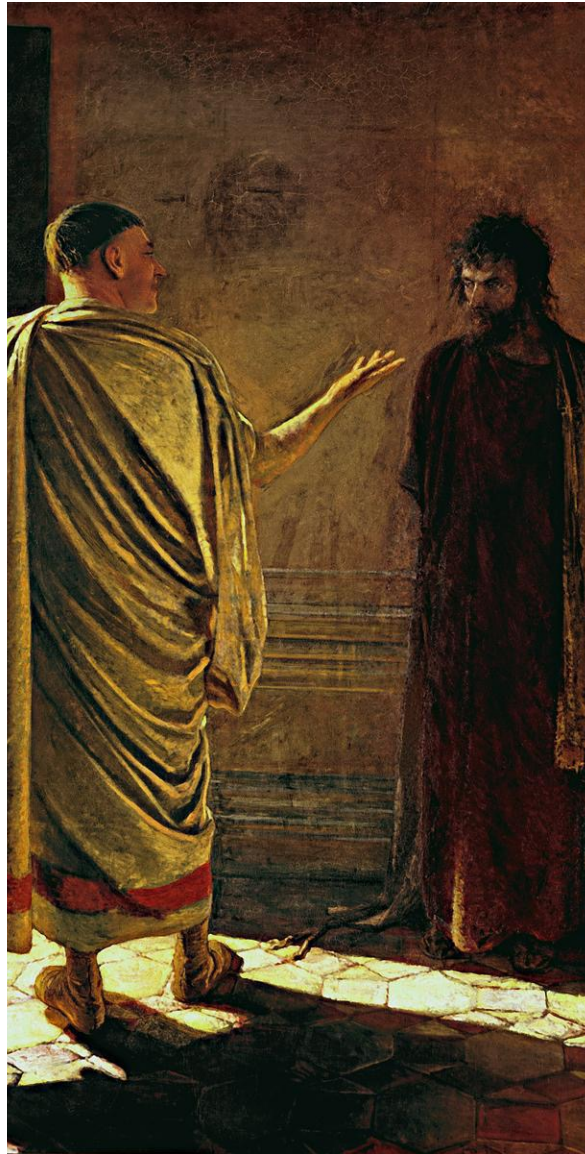
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Jesus the Communicator

- Jesus is the incarnate *logos* (Jn 1:1).
- In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways; ... in these last days, he spoke to us through a Son” (Heb 1:1).
- “This scripture passage has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21)
- “Never has anyone spoken like this man” (Jn 7:46)
- While we will never speak with Jesus’ authority, examining his communication style will help us not only as disciples but also in our work as communicators in the various forms our work will take.





Jesus told the truth

- He came, as he said to Pilate, “to give witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37)
- Jesus was not a spinmeister.
- Jesus spoke the truth even when it wouldn’t be well-received or would lead to his condemnation.
- He avoided every temptation to win arguments at the expense of the truth or to deceive.





Jesus summoned others to honesty

- To the high priest he said, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews gather; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said ... If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (Jn 18:20-23).
- Sometimes, without losing our cool, we too will need to call others to similar honesty.





Jesus confirmed his words with deeds

- Jesus was the exact opposite of a hypocrite (actor). He acted with integrity and consistency.
- In the healing of the paralytic, he confirmed what he said by what he did: “So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (Mt 9:6).
- Jesus said, “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works” (Jn 10:37-38).
- During the Last Supper, Jesus said, “I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done” (Jn 13:15)





Jesus showed a humble mastery

- To the question, “Which is the greatest commandment?,” he showed that he knew all 613, and gave not merely the most important but the second most important (Mt 22:36ff). While we won’t have the same knowledge, the better we know the facts, the more we can marshal them effectively.
- At the same time, he would, on occasion, acknowledge what he didn’t know: “But of that day and hour, no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mk 13:32)





Jesus was a meek and effective spokesman of Another

- “My teaching is not my own, but is from the one who sent me” (Jn7:16)
- “I do nothing on my own, but say only what the Father has taught me” (Jn 8:28)
- “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18)
- The more effectively we can communicate what God has said, to incarnate the truth that has set us free, the more the Word will be able to inform and persuade.





Jesus would start where listeners were and lead them step-by-step

- With the Rich Young Man, “Why do you call me good?” (Mt 19:17)
- With the Samaritan woman, he began with the request, “Give me a drink,” and ultimately revealed her thirst and his desire as Messiah to quench it (Jn 4:1-42).
- With the man born blind, Jesus led him ultimately to confess him as the Messiah and to worship him as Son of God (Jn 9:1-41)





Jesus would challenge people to more

- “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48)
- “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44)
- “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his very life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26)
- “If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off...” (Mt 18:8)
- We often fail to call people to high standards because we hold their capacities in low esteem.





Jesus invited people to get involved

- To Andrew and the other disciple, “Come and See” (Jn 1:39)
- To many of the disciples, “Come, follow me” (Mk 10:21)
- He didn’t stay at the level of informing people about reality, but invited them to walk with him in the way of truth.





Jesus did not try to say everything

- In the Upper Room, Jesus said, “I have much more to say to you but you cannot handle it now” (Jn 16:12).
- We will similarly have much more to say that we can say, but we must acknowledge, word and time limits as well as others’ capacities to receive.
- We should think about the points we’ve made or can make to make them well, rather than focus on what we cannot say.





Jesus would return to first principles

- When questioned about divorce, Jesus took things back to the beginning (Mt 19:1-9).
- We see this as well when Jesus regularly speaks with the “authority” of the “author,” bringing things past opinions.
- When first principles are held in common, they provide an opportunity to start from something everyone knows to bring them to an accord on things about which they may not know yet, or on which they superficially disagree.





Jesus would routinely “refocus”

- Jesus was constantly bringing things back to the bigger picture.
- When asked, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?,” he said rather, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate” (Lk 13:23-24).
- When they asked when Jesus had arrived, he replied, “Do not labor for the food that perishes” (Jn 6:25-27)
- When people queried about the end of the world, he said, “Be vigilant and alert” (Mt 24:42 ff).
- When Peter asked him what would happen to John, Jesus said, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Your business is to follow me” (Jn 21:21-22)
- Jesus was constantly shifting from superficialities to weighty matters, from “gnats” to “camels” (Mt 23:24)

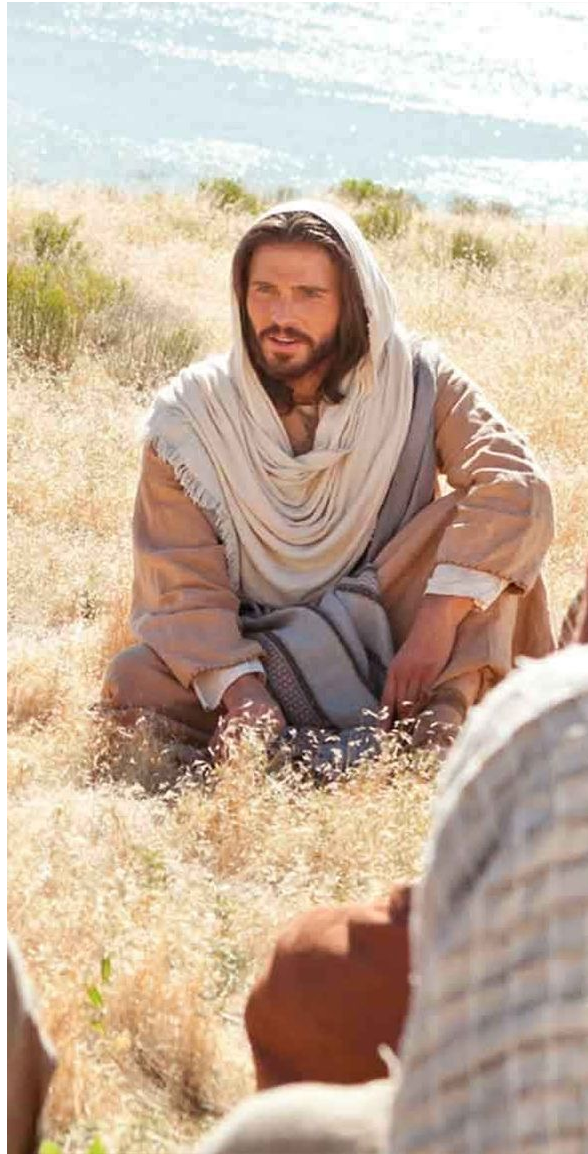




Jesus would often ask questions

- He started asking questions as a 12-year old in the Temple (Lk 2:46-47)
- To Nathaniel, “Do you believe because I said I saw you under the fig tree?” (Jn 1:50)
- To Nicodemus, “Are you a teacher in Israel and you do not understand these things?” (Jn 3:10)
- In Caesarea Philippi, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?... Who do you say that I am?” (Mt 16:13,15)
- To Philip, “Where are we to buy bread for all these people to eat?” (Jn 6:5)
- To apostles, “Will you, too, go away?” (Jn 6:67)
- In Emmaus, “What are you discussing along the way?” (Lk 24:17)





Jesus used everyday images

- Jesus regularly used images taken from every day life: salt, light, leaven; fishermen and fishing; doctors and illnesses; shepherds and wandering sheep; weddings processions and banquets; losing coins; patches on unshrunk cloth; wine and wineskins, grains of wheat and mustard seeds; friends knocking on your door at night; construction projects like building a tower; unemployment lines of people looking for work; and more.
- He used these images as analogies to communicate the realities of faith in a comprehensible way.

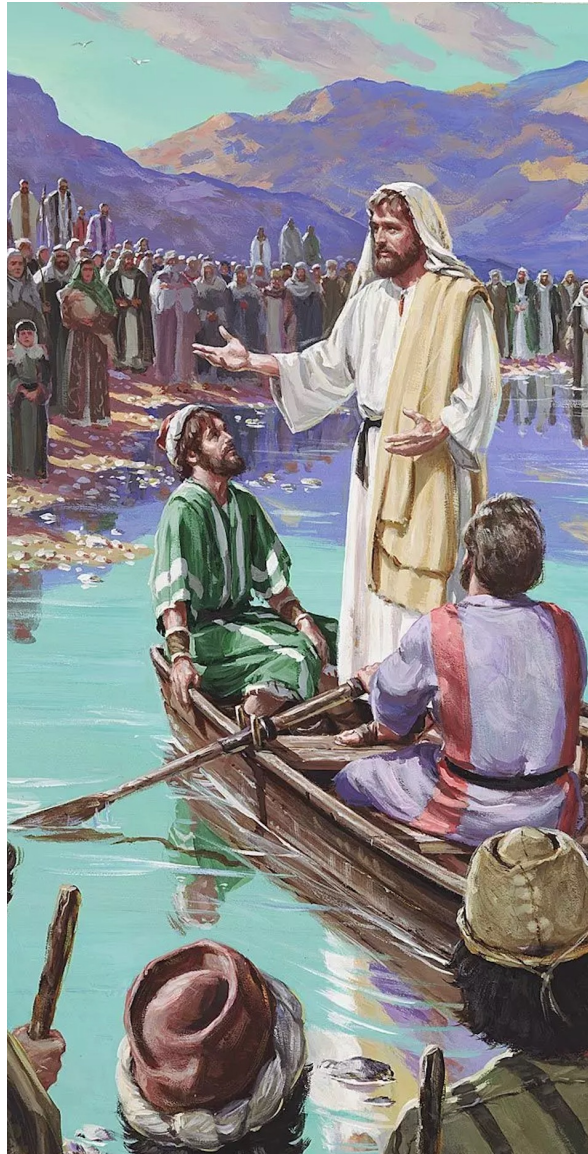




Jesus used stories

- “All this Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable” (Mt 13:34).
- He was a master story-teller: Prodigal Son, Good Samaritan, Talents, Wicked Servant, Treasure Buried in a field, and more.
- These stories inspire wonder, but also are a test for those who don’t want to hear. “I speak to them in parables, because ... hearing they do not hear nor do they understand” (Mt 13:13)
- We can often bring people to the truth more easily indirectly, than directly (like Nathan before David).





Jesus used paradoxes

- “Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mk 8:35).
- “The last shall be first and the last shall be first” (Mt 20:16)
- The beatitudes are all paradoxical.
- When paradoxes are well-used, they capture our attention, they’re memorable and show mastery of a subject.
- Chesterton showed the power of paradoxes for contemporary men and women.





Jesus used antitheses

- Beyond paradoxes, Jesus used contrasts to emphasize his points.
- We see this most clearly during the Sermon on the Mount. “You have heard that it was said, ... but I say to you.”
- These contrasts not only grab attention; they help listeners to go from what they know to where Jesus wants to take them.





What the use of parables, paradoxes and antitheses show

- Jesus recognized that not everyone would understand. This was not because of reason but will.
- “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mt 11:15)
- “My sheep hear my voice and follow me. ... Whoever listens to the truth hears my voice” (Jn 10:27)
- Parable of the Sower and the Seed and the four types of soil (Mt 13:1-23)
- Sometimes, even when the message is crystal clear people may not receive what is communicated.





Jesus would say things provocatively

- To the Canaanite woman, “It is not fair to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs”(Mt 15:26)
- To Peter, “Get behind me, Satan” (Mt 16:23)
- To the Sadducees, “You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt 22:29)
- To the apostles, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me” (Jn 13:21)





Jesus pointed out others' inconsistency

- In healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, Jesus told those who objected: “Which one of you who has a sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable a person is than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath (Mt 10:11-12).
- Sometimes it's important for us to show the principles by which others live, even when they pretend as if we're not living by the appropriate principles.





Jesus would occasionally upbraid

- “Woe to you, Chorazin and Bethsaida!” (Mt 11:21)
- “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men’” (Mt 15:7-8)
- Jesus said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?” (Mt 17:17)
- To Philip, Jesus said, “Have I been with you so long and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’” (Jn 14:9-10)
- To upbraid well, with charity, is hard to do and isn’t a general Christian method, but righteous indignation is occasionally important, like with abuse.





Jesus avoided being cornered

- When the Pharisees tried to entrap him over the question of paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus replied, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:15-22).
- When they were trying to entrap him with the women caught in adultery, Jesus replied, “Let him who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her” (Jn 8:1-11).
- When they were questioning his authority to cleanse the temple, Jesus first asked them to declare publicly the origin of John’s baptism (Mt 21:23-27).
- All of these scenes showed not just Jesus’ composure but his focus on weightier things and on motivations.





Jesus was willing to suffer ridicule

- His cousins that he was out of his mind (Mk 3:21)
- The mourners of the daughter of Jairus laughed at him when he said, “She’s not dead, but sleeping” (Lk 8:32).
- By these occasions, he showed he had no ego. He kept going when criticized.

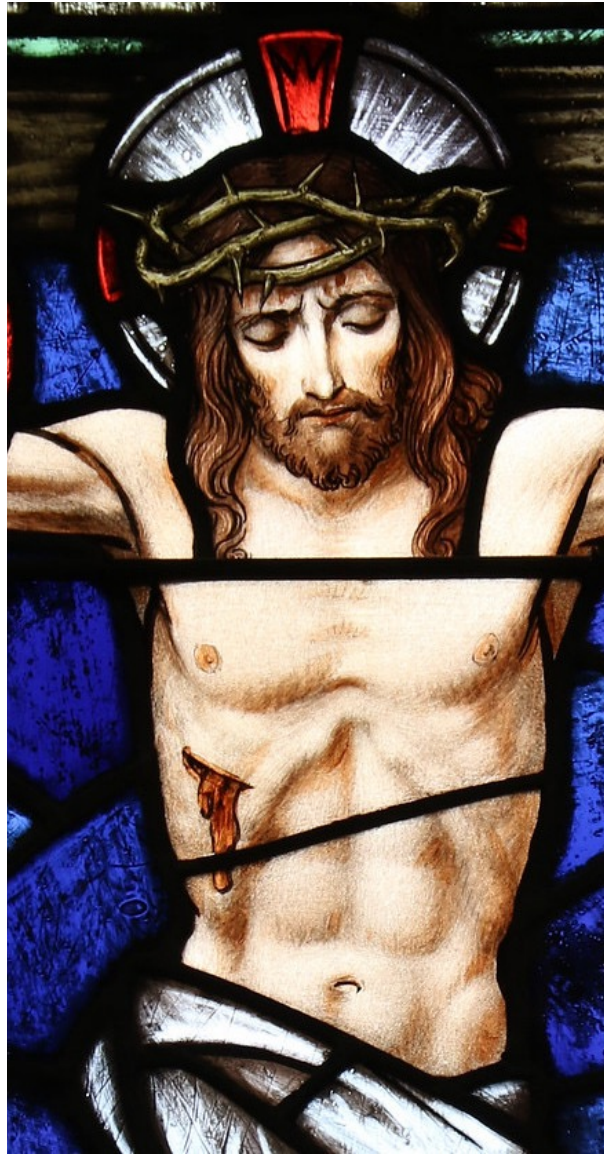




Jesus didn't nurse wounds

- Like good closers after blown saves in baseball, Jesus had a short memory for emotional hurts and taught them to have it.
- He tried to pass on that to his disciples when he sent them out with the instructions that if they experienced opposition and objections to “wipe the dust from your feet” rather than carry the rejection with them to the next place.
- Christian communicators need to have the same forgetfulness and thick skin.





Jesus spoke even in silence

- He was silent before the high priest who questioned “Have you no answer to make?” (Mt 26:62-63)
- He was silent before Herod (Lk 23:9)
- He was silent before Pilate (Mt 27:14)
- He was silent except for seven sentences over six hours on the Cross.
- Cardinal Robert Sarah: God’s first language is silence.
- Silence is an opportunity to listen.





In Summary

- Jesus, the incarnate Word, shows us the importance in communication of truthfulness and calling others to honesty, first principles, images, stories, paradoxes, contrasts, focusing on the bigger picture, asking questions, transcending traps, meeting people where they're at while summoning them to high standards, conciseness, humble mastery of the subject matter, inviting people to responsibility, a thick skin, consistency and integrity, and speaking through silence.
- In communication, as in other things, he calls us to follow him.





Questions to Begin Our Discussion

- Having focused on the attributes of Jesus as a communicator, how do you think he would be as a journalist or commentator? What would he easily do well? What challenges might he face?
- In order to be a truth-teller in an age of ideologies and hypersensitivities, Catholic media professionals need to have courage. How do Jesus' words "Be not afraid!" most need to be applied to media work?
- What can we learn from Jesus' silence about how to be effective ministers of the Word and truth?





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