

Caution! Warning! Danger!

In a little over a month I will be 55 years old. And yet, every time I visit my parents and the time comes to end the visit and return to the rectory, I get the admonition from one or other parent **“Drive slow!”** Sometimes I ignore it. Sometimes it drives me mad. Other times I try to understand what it even means: Is driving “slow” inherently safer than driving “fast?” Do they not, rather, mean to say to me, *“Drive safe?”* Whatever! Its irritating!

If we lived in a perfect world there would be no need for words of caution or warning. And what a wonderful world that would be: Warnings and words of caution can be so irritating, (see above). When they are unnecessary this is particularly the case, but even when they are timely and necessary, they put upon us, yet another, task or burden. They are like annoying speed bumps on the road of life.

The passage from the the Mass of the Day on which I am composing this reflection is from Ephesians 5 wherein St. Paul warns: *“Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among you as is fitting among the holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving.”*

The Bible is full of warnings and admonitions about the moral life and the life of faith. Jesus says, *“Things that cause sin will inevitably occur, but woe to the person through whom they occur. It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. Be on your guard!”* (Luke 17:2). St. James is equally blunt when he issues a warning: *“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we shall go into such and such a town, spend a year there doing business, and make a profit.’ You have no idea what your life will be like tomorrow. You are a puff of smoke, that appears briefly and then disappears.”*

My parent’s constant warnings about my driving are not helpful and are unnecessary at this point in my life. They are, therefore, just an annoyance. But, in other ways, I do need to be heedful about warnings and take admonitions seriously: *“Be careful about how much you drink when you have to drive.”* *“Be careful of putting yourself in an occasion of sin, (i.e. exposing one’s self to powerful temptation.)”*

“Carefully watch your language!” And I could go on and on with many more examples.

Part of the “Teaching Office” of the Church includes these sorts of messages. They are not the only thing we ought to be saying, but they remain critical elements for offering guidance and provoking introspection and reflection.

Regrettably, with respect to this topic, there are many who feel the Church is the “Cosmic Killjoy.” Or, another way of expressing the protest is that the Church is always a big “No!” to everything and anything pleasurable or fun or popular. I suggest that this may be because too many receive Church teaching refracted through the lens of the news media rather than from “the horse’s mouth.” You will never get a nuanced understanding of such teachings from a soundbite, because soundbites, by design, are meant to keep you from turning the channel during the commercial!



Inasmuch as I have treated controversial topics in this column, the point has always been to inform and offer the nuance for proper understanding. It is decidedly not to be paternalistic or condemning of all things modern or popular. I have taken up topics like Annulments, Abortion, Reiki, Yoga, Personality, Politics, Sexuality, etc. Rarely is anything written-off as altogether evil unless it is clearly inimical to faith. I would not be doing my job if I were not trying to take up these and other matters and holding them up to the measure of our beliefs!

As readers or hearers of the Word and of those who are tasked with conveying it or preaching it, we have a responsibility to discern our own sensitivities and biases. Moreover, as I wrote earlier, the warnings and words of caution, by their nature, tweak us and burden us. But, they may also save us grief on our pilgrim way. After all, it is not a perfect world.