

## ***“Living the Mystery”***

by Fr. Augie Gothman

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### **A Preacher’s Duty**

Some of you will say in a long political season, after a deluge of ads for this and that candidate; “Church should be a place of rest and refuge from these goings-on.” “Why can’t preachers just stick to talking about holy, churchly things?” “Why do these Bishops have to stick their noses where they have no business?” Here is an example of a bishop’s preaching I’ve read lately:

*The large rooms of which you are so proud are in fact your shame. They are big enough to hold crowds--and also big enough to shut out the voice of the poor.... There is your sister or brother, naked, crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering. Saint Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, Italy (d.397)*

Though this sounds very contemporary, the words are over 1500 years old. Ambrose and other bishops knew a duty was placed on them as teachers of the Church to preach to the real issues their people faced. Even in their time, some tried to distinguish between life “in church” and “real life”. These bishops did their best to make clear that there was to be no separation in the life of a Christian—it’s all real life.

Certainly, such issues are complicated, and require more nuance than there is room for in this brief space. Challenging preaching must be done according to St. Paul’s motto: “*to speak the truth in love*” (Eph. 4:15). And yet, in the example from St. Ambrose we see real issues that faced the early church still face us today. There are issues that offend persons of faith striving to live the Gospel today; just as there were millennia ago.

Bishops, preachers, and all people of faith are still obliged to preach and teach clearly to real issues; making room for legitimate differences and variations. We who hear them are to listen in faith, even if our consciences are pricked; because sometimes the truth hurts before it heals.

Sometimes the reaction of those who hear will be strong. St. John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople, preached against corruption in the Imperial household, and the Empress Eudoxia had him sent into exile. He died *en route*.

In this season filled with competing claims and voices, we all need to take time in prayer and reflection about how we live the truth and order our society. I pray often for Bishop Hoepfner and my brother priests and deacons charged with the proclamation of the Gospel and preaching. I pray, too, for myself and all of us who hear the Word proclaimed and preached; that we may all, “*grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ,[who] brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love.*”(Eph. 4:15-16)