

Living My Faith with Integrity: Ten Touchstones

Living with integrity as a Catholic Christian requires discernment, occasional courage, and a capacity to live with tension and ambiguity. Here are ten touchstones or principles that help guide my struggle for integrity as a person of faith.

1. Spirituality and religion are not the same, but they need each other.

I cannot expect institutional religion to do what it can't. It can help sustain me but cannot substitute for the hard work of spiritual growth.

2. Spirituality and religion have a symbiotic, developmental relationship.

There is an ebb and flow to the spiritual life, and institutional religion can play a greater and lesser role in my growth as my life unfolds.

3. The church exists for the reign of God, not for my edification or enlightenment.

When frustration surfaces, what prompts it? If it's because the church isn't meeting *my* needs, my motivation may be suspect. If it's because the church is not living in tune with the demands of the reign of God, my frustration may be not only warranted but life-giving for both me and the church.

4. I must keep perspective and focus on the "big picture."

I have to decide what is worth losing sleep over and what is not. The cliché says, Don't sweat the small stuff. The older I get, the more small stuff there is!

5. I can't be too quick to judge . . . either the church or myself.

What looks now like loss or failure or backsliding may be the threshold of genuine growth. What is the long-term *trajectory* of my faith journey and my relationship with the church?

6. I will think globally, but stay connected locally and personally.

I must be informed about the worldwide church without becoming obsessed with it. I must stay grounded in the local faith community and nurture personal relationships with other believers.

7. When in conflict but unsure, I will stick with church leadership and Tradition; when in conflict but convinced, I must act prophetically.

The wisdom of the church sustains me in times of doubt and uncertainty. But that same wisdom grows over time through the courageous witness of believers who respond to the promptings of the Spirit.

8. I must recognize and embrace the responsibility of leadership.

It is said that Catholics are just like other people, only more so. And church leaders are just like other Catholics, only more so. Discernment, patience, perspective, reluctance to judge, courage—the importance of such qualities increases in direct proportion to my influence within the community.

9. I must stay grounded in prayer, both personal and communal.

Mature spirituality is the fruit of prayer. When the well runs dry, when anger and frustration rather than hope and courage begin to dominate my life—these often signal that my prayer life needs tending.

10. I will discover real power in my powerlessness.

Even Jesus had to say, "I wish things were different, but your will be done." All who hope to follow him must make his last prayer their own: "Into your hands . . ." My goal and responsibility is not success, but fidelity. But the challenging question persists—fidelity to what . . . or to whom?