

(Preceded by the skit *Whose You Are*)

That little skit is very silly, and we're going to work our way back to it, but I want to start with a quote from St. Augustine from the 4th century. As the holder of the chair of rhetoric in Milan he was expected to give speeches of praise to the emperor on state occasions. He wrote, "I was preparing to recite praises of the emperor, most of which were lies, and by so lying win favor from those who knew [that they were lies]." (Augustine, *Confessions* VI.6 tr. PHEME PERKINS).

That may be all too real in your life if you are a manager in business, especially a large company. Word comes from on high of what you are to say and how you are to act; how you are to present certain policies and market certain products. Maybe it's true and accurate and maybe it isn't. Either way, you know that the price of your job is towing the party line. The same thing goes for politicians.

But of course we are all liars at one level or another. Pamela Meyer raises the idea that we are lied to between 10 and 200 times per day. Think of all the promises spam and junk mail make to you. Think of what political leaders often say. But of course we lie to each other all the time too. Again Pamela Meyers suggests that one in five things a college student tells a parent is a lie. And one in ten communications between spouses are lies.

I'm not going to ask you to raise your hands if you've done this because I know you have. You're in the grocery store intently looking for something on a shelf when out of the corner of your eye you spot an annoying acquaintance whose just rounded the corner. What goes through your mind? Flee! But you can't. You've been spotted and your trapped. It would be rude to turn you balk and walk briskly away. So what do you do? You hitch a smile to your face, pretend to be happy to see him or her, and you greet this person. All the while you're talking you're thinking of how annoyed you are and how you want to be doing anything other than standing here. Whenever it does end, hopefully quickly, you pleasantly wish them good day. And the moment their back is turned what runs through your mind? "MORON!" Or something similar.

You've just had an entire conversation that was a lie. Sadly lies are part and parcel of daily life. Why do we lie? There's any number of reasons - to get away with something, to be polite, to keep something secret; even if it is something good like a surprise party.

Like today, it was typical in Augustine's day in the fourth and fifth centuries to make speeches that were lies. And that is the same way it was in the first century. Our second reading from Ephesians is playing on that tendency to butter up the rich and powerful; except it isn't exaggerating at all. It's talking about God. We want to read those verses in the light of a speech someone would give to royalty:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places..."

Can't you see someone giving that sort of speech to a king? Except it's real. It's using an exaggerated style, but not exaggerating. You can boast about what God has done, and what God will do, and still be telling the truth.

What will God do? Ephesians tells us that God adopts us as his children. But does God do it grudgingly? No, God does it gladly, delightedly. Like telling a kid that has just walked into a candy store that he or she can buy everything in sight.

So, we are adopted, we are forgiven and redeemed, we will be lavished in God's gracious goodness, we are marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, and we will know God's will. All done in God's delight.

So if we return to our entrance at the pearly gates skit we see where Ephesians is pointing us.

The middle level corporate manager is more hoping that what he or she says is true. Politicians lie today and hope you'll forget by tomorrow. The word of our God is secure. It isn't your merit it is Christ's merit that saves you. It isn't who you are, it is whose you are - a child of God called and kept forever in God's gracious love.

Amen