

Words Have Meaning

by Pastor Marc's Remarks, gsplainview.com

The late U.S. Supreme Justice Antonin Scalia is credited with saying, “Words have meaning. And their meaning doesn’t change.” If that is true, may I suggest we accurately transmit those words? In a speech delivered in 1995 at Stanford University, the Judge remarked, “Words do have a limited range of meaning, and no interpretation that goes beyond that range is permissible.”

While this purest viewpoint may be applicable to legal decisions, we know that language is fluid. Linguistics teaches us that the words we use are a reflection not only of what they are communicating, but the specific time and culture in which they are being used. Words can translate formality, relationships, ethnicity, social stratifications. Words, I’d argue, are so much more than words. And their meanings can be limitless. Consider the word “friend,” for instance. Until recently, this was singularly used as a noun. However, since the advent of social media, it is now widely accepted as a verb.

[St. Augustine of Hippo: He wrote extensively on how language serves as an instrument of truth. He believed that human words point to objective reality and that words are meant to glorify God by conforming to the ultimate "Word," Jesus Christ. He famously warned against the misuse of language, noting that untruthful or careless words corrupt the speaker.

St. John Chrysostom: Known as the "golden-mouthed" preacher, he famously preached on the gravity of speech. He asserted that words are a profound gift from God used to build up the community and teach truth, and that careless speech misuses a divine gift.

St. Francis de Sales: The patron saint of writers and journalists, he dedicated much of his teachings to the importance of charitable and truthful dialogue. He stressed that language must be used to spread peace and understanding, and that words should align with the speaker's true intentions to maintain integrity.]

Nonetheless, I suspect the good judge would end the debate with the final word - the Word of the Lord. Scalia, who was reportedly a devoted man of faith, would know these words, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).” There is nothing that changes that meaning.

The Last Gospel: Prologue of John (John 1:1–14)

(This was read at the end of every Catholic Mass until 1964)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing that was made: in Him was life, and the life was the Light of men; and the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to give testimony of the Light, that all men might believe through him. He was not the Light, but was to give testimony of the Light. That was the true Light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.

He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His Name, who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH,
and dwelt among us:

and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the Only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Nicene Creed states, in what is an elaboration of the prologue of St. John's Gospel, "*I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.*"

The Last Gospel serves as a summation of the Mass, analogous (comparable in certain respects) to the Mass in miniature, and serves as a meditation on the mysteries in which we have just participated.

(By Tate Pumfrey, catholicinsight.com)

