

POLITICS AS USUAL: Political Apology?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

The Nuns of the Sisters of Loretto were a rather strict bunch.

Hard work and personal excellence was expected of all of us, as was personal responsibility and integrity. The nuns expected that, if you did something wrong, you stood up, took responsibility and apologized. Clearly. Succinctly. And immediately.

I recall being in Grade 8, and standing before Sister Sheila and my whole classroom and apologizing for something ? I cannot recall what I had done, but I clearly recall that apology. The effect was profound. I learned the power of contrition ? true contrition - and taking responsibility for my own actions.

It's been 25 years since I left the abbey, so maybe that isn't enough time to long for the good old days, but if you allow me the conceit, I would like to say that I truly miss the age when people took responsibility for their own actions.

When they refused to pass the buck, throw someone else under the bus, blame the failure on the system, or excuse it as due to the latest ?ism?. When an apology was expected and often all that was needed.

What's wrong with recognizing you have made a mistake and simply apologizing to those you have aggrieved?

Whatever happened to the concept, let alone the reality of a true apology?

To paraphrase my dad, ?it's gone the way of the Dodo?. What we have nowadays is the qualified apology (if we get one at all). You know the kind of apology your 8-year-old would give you when caught teasing his sister? The ?I'm sorry but??and fill in the blanks.

It's the sorta, kinda, not really an apology apology that we have now become so familiar with.

Watch the interview with Lance Armstrong when he finally admits to taking the drugs he denied taking for over a decade. His ?apology? was truly one of the most odious displays of the non-apology apology I've ever seen. Qualified language mixed in with some defiance and a good serving of defensiveness to boot.

Speaking of odiousness, we have the masters of the non-apology apology ? Politicians. We have all seen the familiar press conference where the politician and his or her spouse (and sometimes even their children!) stand before the flashing cameras and offer a carefully parsed statement of apology.

Usually the statement is so qualified, so legally constructed, that it means absolutely nothing. It is not an apology. It serves no purpose but a political one.

Just a side note about the politicians who drag their children into these unseemly spectacles: it's one thing to have the wife stand there with the Stepford-wife smile plastered on her face while the Senator or Congressman admits to whatever his transgression may be (and then promptly blames on ?illness? or ?stress? or what have you).

The spouse is an adult and can choose for themselves. Children cannot. I think it is particularly loathsome to use one's children as political props.

But I digress.

Much like the Lance Armstrong approach to ?apology?, we have politicians of every level ? Senators, Mayors (okay, one Mayor), Councillors and a few MPs ? parade before the cameras and microphones and ? God help us ? the twitterverse and proffer up that noxious mix of the qualified apology and offensive defensiveness.

It's as if by apologizing they are admitting a weakness and thus resort to attacks while doing so.

Yes, an apology can be construed as an acknowledgement of guilt and thus some folks fear that by saying sorry they are opening themselves up to legal action.

That is a fair concern. As anyone who has lived in Aurora these past five years can tell you, we understand that we live in a litigious age and saying what you think ? even if it's an apology ? could see you hauled into court.

But, I don't think that should stop you. It is the right thing to do and can often stop a situation from mushrooming into something much larger.

So, to the Senator that sent that condescending, vitriol-laced letter to the MP? He should simply apologize for his extraordinary lack of judgment.

Rob Ford? Should simply apologize to that reporter. Full stop.

And to the myriad other politicians who engage in name calling instead of debate in our Council Chambers ? just apologize already. One can't preach about personal integrity if one doesn't demonstrate it oneself.

Love may mean never having to say you're sorry, but it sure would help.

Until next year, stay informed, stay involved because this is, after all, Our Town.