



Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia speaks at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City Nov. 23, 2024. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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March 21, 2025

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People who do not rise to the occasion tend to be lost to history, their failings or silence leaving no mark. They are not necessarily bad people. They go with the flow, or let the flow overwhelm them.

Sometimes, however, people do rise to the occasion; they accurately assess a difficult situation, and they raise their voice. They lead. Archbishop Borys Gudziak, of the Ukrainian Archeparchy of Philadelphia, is such a man.

Last week, when the Trump administration moved to disband the Voice of America, Gudziak [posted a statement](#) on Facebook. "For decades repressed peoples could count on the VOA to provide accurate information about American and world affairs. Information to them denied, information forbidden," Gudziak rightly said.

Anyone who has had cousins who lived behind the Iron Curtain or in other places where authoritarians and autocrats carefully managed a party line knows the truth of the archbishop's comments.

Gudziak did not merely give a shoutout to the now-unemployed journalists who lost their jobs. He captured the moral failure that led to the shuttering of VOA.

"What the Soviet Union could not achieve, what the Russian, Iranian, Chinese, and other authoritarian regimes could only dream about has been accomplished by the American presidential administration: the silencing of America's 83-[year]-old service of media support for democracy, international law and justice and the defense of human rights." Trump has succeeded where Brezhnev and Mao and Khomeini failed. Let that sink in.

The archbishop's comment reminds us of a painful and easily misused lesson of history: A traitor to freedom inside the castle is much more dangerous than an enemy outside. Sen. Joe McCarthy abused that insight to falsely accuse patriotic Americans of ideological crimes they did not commit. But the abuse does not vitiate the truth. The havoc and moral turpitude Trump is visiting on America today is more dangerous, and dangerous to so many, than many external threats our nation has faced.

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Gudziak listed several courageous and excellent VOA journalists by name, such as Ostap Yarysh and Oleksii Kovalenko, commending them for their work. "I thank all those who have worked at VOA until today and over the last 83 years bringing truth and hope to hundreds of millions of persecuted people, to entire captive nations. We are ashamed that America is silencing its own voice," he said.

Then the archbishop took it up a notch. Leaders not only assess the moral stakes of a given situation and diagnose problems. They bring perspective and they bring courage and they bring direction.

"Such setbacks will not be permanent," Gudziak's statement concluded. "Do not lose faith. Be inspired by Ukrainians who sacrifice their lives and livelihoods for freedom and justice. Do not fear! God's truth will prevail! Ostap, Oleksii and the former VOA journalists will not be silenced. Neither should be you or I!"

"Prophetic" is a much-bastardized word. Some claim to be adopting a "prophetic stance" when they invoke a newfangled concept like decolonization theory or promote an agenda that is unknown to, and discordant with, our tradition. That is not prophecy.

Further, the mantle of prophecy is only bestowed on those who are reluctant to wear it. Isaiah, remember, only found his prophetic voice after the seraphim singed his lips with a burning ember ([Isaiah 6:6-7](#)).

Prophets call a people back to their truest selves, to the roots of their tradition, to what is best in their past and, just so, what is needed now and in their future.

Gudziak's voice is prophetic in this proper sense of the word. He is calling Americans to rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of freedom and justice. He is calling us to speak out against threats to that pursuit. This American-born prelate, who spent most of his adult life outside the United States, has returned to remind us of our roots, of our past, of our truest selves.

And, like Isaiah, Gudziak's lips have been singed, not by an ember taken from a celestial altar, but by the conflagration of war and the prospect of freedom being lost.

The question for the Catholic Church in the United States is whether we will heed Gudziak's prophetic call. Or not.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)