

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time: Children of the New Adam

As I have mentioned before, I like listening to college level and beyond lectures whenever I walk. Most of them are from the Great Courses. However, just as in college, some of these lectures are much better than others. And there are times that the professor seems to have his or her own agenda and fits the facts to prove his or her point.

Recently, I have been doing a course on Religion and Violence. This is not one of the better courses. The professor uses only those facts he finds convenient, ignoring that which does not coalesce with his thoughts. For example, he has a lecture on Christianity and slavery, and never even mentions the *Letter of Paul to Philemon*, which is really about treating slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ. Worse, in his presentation of Christianity and violence, he emphasizes those passages that seem to support violence, such as Christ saying, "I have come to bring a sword," taking it out of context, and completely ignoring today's Gospel: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well,"

Well, that professor is not the only one who ignores this teaching of Christ. Many people feel violence should be answered with violence. They will sight the Old Testament dictate, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," refusing to consider how Christ said in Matthew 5:38-42: "You have heard that it said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say to you, Resist not evil: but whosoever shall strike you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

What are we to do? Are we to allow others to abuse us? Are all those women in the "Me-too Movement" wrong to demand justice? Are adults who attack children to be allowed to go with no punishment for their actions? Is there to be no protection for children? Obviously, no to all of this and so much more.

Then how are we to reconcile the wrong that has been done to us and to others with the Law of Love?

I'd like to consider how we can deal with personal attacks and then consider how we can deal with the negativity of society.

First, personal attacks.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus commands us to love our enemies. Many people suppose that no one except a saint could fulfill this command. Other people think that this command is only an encouragement to go along with evil, because if you love your enemy instead of clobbering him, you enable him to continue his wrongdoing.

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that love consists in two desires: (1) a desire for the

good for the beloved person, and (2) a desire for union with that person. If we want union with our enemy, we would not want him to go to hell because he has hurt us. Let me flesh this out for you with an example. A woman, we'll say her name is Joan, has been grievously attacked by a man, we'll say his name is Frank. Joan can only love her enemy, Frank, if she desires good for Frank and union with Frank. What is good for Frank will ultimately on Frank's acceptance of God's grace. But desiring Frank's good requires Joan's foregoing punishment for him if that would be for his good—or insisting on punishment for him if that would be for his good. What is best for Frank is whatever it takes to bring him to a morally good condition in mind and will; and that might very well include Joan's calling the police to arrest him. For this same reason, Joan's desire for union with Frank need not include a desire for companionship with him. If Frank is entirely unrepentant, then Joan's desire for union with him should not involve a willingness to be in his company. Joan herself might not be able to tolerate the very sight of Frank without her entering into emotional turmoil. So many women cannot be in the presence of those who victimized them. Joan's desire for union with Frank can appropriately come to no more than the desire that Frank will repent and reform.

To love our enemy then is not to enable him to continue to do morally wrong acts against us or anybody else either. If we want what is good for our enemy, we will want for him what we want for ourselves: to be a person who has love for the Lord and obedience to Him. And if we want union with our enemy, we would not want him to go to hell because he has hurt us. Rather, we will be glad if in love and obedience to the Lord, he finds his way to heaven.

Secondly, how do we as Christians deal with the negativity, and the absolute hatred we experience in our present political climate?

Consider this: there is a famous billboard that hangs along a congested highway. People stuck in bumper to bumper traffic, going 5 miles an hour, look up and read "You aren't stuck in traffic. You **are** traffic!" That's a great insight! We distance ourselves from a problem, whether it is our politics, our churches, the ecological problems on our planet, or most anything else. We are not, as we want to think, stuck in a bad political climate wherein we can no longer talk to each other and live respectfully with each other. Rather we ourselves have become so rigid, arrogant, and sure of ourselves that we can no longer respect those who think differently than we do. We **are** a bad political climate and not just stuck in one. We are not separate from the events that make up the world news each day. Rather, what we see written large in the world news each night so often reflects what's going on hidden inside of us. When we see instances of injustice, bigotry, racism, greed, violence, murder and war on our newscasts we rightly feel moral indignation. It's healthy to feel that way, but it's not healthy to naively think that it's only others and not us, who are the problem. When we are honest we have to admit that to some degree we are complicit in all these things, perhaps not in their crasser forms, but in subtler, though very real, ways. The fear and paranoia that are at the root of so much conflict in our world are not foreign to us. We too find it hard to accept those who are

different from us. We too cling to privilege and do most everything we can to secure and protect our comfort.

The evening news so often shows in a large way what is inside our hearts. What's in the macrocosm is also in the microcosm. In many ways we are not just viewers of the evening news, we are complicit in it. The old catechisms were right when they told us that there's no such a thing as a truly private act, that even our most private actions affect everyone else. The private is political. Everything affects everything.

The first take-away from this is obvious: When we find ourselves stuck in traffic, metaphorically and otherwise, we need to admit our own complicity and resist the temptation to simply blame others. But there's another important lesson here too: We are never healthier than when we are confessing our sins; in this case, confessing that we are traffic and not just stuck in traffic.

The way of the Lord is radically different than the way of man. We have been given the grace to choose the way of the Lord. St. Paul reminds us in today's second reading that we are children of both the first Adam and the New Adam. The first Adam was physical. His ways were the ways of the world. The New Adam, Jesus Christ, gave us His Spiritual Life. We belong to the New Adam. We belong to Jesus Christ. May His ways be our ways.