

12th Sun. Ord. Time (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
June 20, 21, 2015

I prepared a homily on Thursday, focused on today's Scriptures and some earlier ideas I had for this weekend. That is not the homily I will preach today, however. I realize it is dangerous to change one's homily within a day of preaching it. I also realize it is dangerous, even foolish, to 'go where maybe angels 'fear to tread'. But I have been foolish before in other situations. I like to think of it as 'being honest'.

The reason for the change is that I cannot think of either today's First Scripture or today's Gospel text without also thinking of the mass shootings on Wednesday evening in Charleston, S.C. One of my classmates, and good priest friend, continues to recommend reading the Bible with the Scriptures in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand. It is a principle I think serves anyone well.

The circumstances in both the First Scripture and the Gospel for today are situations of trouble and desperation. This is most clear in the gospel where the disciples experience a violent squall at sea. They are afraid of sinking. The First Reading's selection is from the Book of Job, and comes from a context in which Job has suffered extreme and prolonged sadness and trial. As you may recall, Job's life falls completely apart: he loses his livestock, his property and eventually his family. He is left only with those who taunt him and test his trust in God's goodness. "How can you continue to trust God after all these terrible things have happened to you." And then the newspaper: nine people in a church, doing Bible study, shot dead.

I feel strongly that the Charleston shootings should be of concern to us, even though we live far away. And if anyone here feels that the long distance is really too far away, Coral Ridge Mall in Coralville, IA is not that far away, and probably a place that you and I have been. Actually, since our gathering here last weekend, I can count 11 deaths by shooting: the 9 in Charleston, 1 in Dallas, 1 in Coralville, and also 1 stabbing in Dubuque. I have no solutions, only questions and concerns. Any solution would be too quick and no doubt superficial. But it is questions and concerns that lead to solutions. To be here today and oblivious to the week we have just lived, is simply naïve, and what we do here not even good worship.

My questions and concerns:

What kind of society are we living in?

What kind of society is this in which we called to be disciples of Jesus?

How are we to be Church in this kind of society?

What are we being called to do and to say? And, who will do this, and who will speak it?

What is the source of the unrest that seems to fill our society?

Are we an angry society? And where does our anger come from? What is present or what is maybe missing in our lives that might cause this?

Why are we so intolerant of others? Why can't I live among those different from me?

Does the 'r' word really apply? Are we racist?

Are we really the 'ugly American', even within the borders of our own nation?

Am I afraid of others? Am I afraid that others will have or get what I want?

And why do so many not have the opportunities I have? Is this what makes them angry?

Is there some connection between the headlines of our newspapers and our highly consumerist life styles, our growing individualism and narcissism?

Where does Jesus, where does the Sermon on the Mount fit into any or all of this?

Why do so many become upset when religion is brought into the public square, and when the things of the public square are brought into the church ... as I am clearly doing today? How is it that we can pray on Sunday, but dislike, sometimes ignore and even kill each other during the week.

As we observe Father's Day this weekend, what support are we maybe not giving to our dads? How do we help them be the moral influence and wisdom persons we need?

And if you heard the words of the families of those killed in Charleston as they spoke at the hearing on Friday, words of incredible forgiveness and pleas of mercy for the killer, are these Catholic words are we as Catholics able to express that ... or is that too evangelical, too Spirit-filled?

These are questions and concerns. Asking them can create the conversation that may lead to some solutions.

In the meanwhile, we gather here. I need to be here. You need to be here. And we need those who are not here to be here with us also. Maybe we need to let go of some of our smaller, more insignificant personal storms at least long enough to recognize that there are far greater storms swirling around us and greatly influencing us. Storms that can either do us in, or become opportunities for our salvation.

Jesus our Lord and Savior invites us to the table. He invites us to share his Body and his Blood. He wants us to eat and drink the food of salvation, the food of life.

As we prepare to go to the altar table, hear again the words of St. Paul:

"Brothers and sisters, the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all;.... He indeed died for all , so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him So whoever is in Christ is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

May this be so and soon! Come, to the table of life.