

Homily112716

STAY AWAKE; KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

(We fall into patterns of self-justification and we think we are entitled to treat in a roughshod manner those with whom we disagree. Who do we think we are?)

Many of you love Facebook. Many of you have never been on Facebook. Some of you post daily or even many times a day. Some of you have never posted anything and never will. I am not someone who posts on Facebook but I do go onto Facebook several times each week. I get to find out what is happening in my family, in parts of the parish, in the wider community and across the length and breadth of the nation. It does bring you face to face with an awful lot of what people are doing or thinking or communicating.

And during the last year or so leading up to our most recent election I was chagrined at the tone of much of what I read, and the attitudes conveyed and the challenges posted. I saw people break off friendships with people, even family, whom they have known for long periods of time. There was disdain, disrespect, dismissive attitudes. There was often an unwillingness to listen to what the other was trying to say. I observed people literally shouted down by the power of the words posted. If I didn't know better I would think that I was witnessing the verbal barrages of people who were at war with each other. And the weapons used were not AK47's and M16's but a rapier-like keyboard and instantaneous judgment and condemnation.

So, has the Internet come to this? That we not only disagree with others but we judge them unworthy and dismiss them as people because of their particular outlook or stance or voting pattern? Where is the Way of Christ in any of that? I sensed that ancient Rome would have been no different had the social resources existed then that exist now. Go back to the first reading from the prophet Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus even lived. The prophet speaks God's words to the people of those days. He tells them to act in such a way as to transform their instruments of war with which they battle each other and defeat their enemies into means of peace and harmony. "Hammer your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks."

So what do you do if your weapons are your words? How do I transform my words from hammering another into submission or at least silence? Must I not choose to keep my mouth closed for a time and choose truly to listen to the other and to listen without judging them—in any way? That would help to change the terrain of relationships.

Must I not stop my cheering when the other side loses and my side wins? Well, Father, this is a competition and winning isn't everything it's the only thing." You know, I have read the New Testament many times from end to end. I do not remember Jesus ever saying that or anything like that. I do remember passages that speak of turning the other cheek. Doing good to those who hurt you. Loving your enemy. Praying for those who persecute you.

One of the things that Jesus taught was that the way you treat people matters. It matters more than anything. That is why he never responded in kind when he was mistreated or disagreed with or taken advantage of by others. He decided who he was going to be, what he was going to be like—all the time, in each and every instance—and then he just lived that way and interacted that way. No matter what the issue.

Part of me thinks that our God has allowed our country to lose its way for a time. In the hope that we will find our way again. We have lost our moral tone and so we nominate individuals who struggle with their own personal moral tone. Jesus has allowed us to fail to observe the normal patterns of human courtesy and politeness and social interaction. Everything is finger pointing and condemnation now. And each side has the feeling of being justified in what they are doing. That in itself is not good. It is not moral. So, it is immoral. And yet we think that our society and culture are immoral but we, of course, are not immoral. Perhaps we need to revisit that thought.

That is what Advent is for and is to be about. We are in danger of destroying ourselves and all while we think we are being pretty righteous. We all believe we have justice on our side and that is what we really want. But the truth is we like winning more than justice. And we can destroy people in the process. Break and sunder relationships of many years. Never utter an apology. Never ask for forgiveness—even in the very Jubilee year of Mercy, so right do we think we are.

Too often we have gotten to the point where we just brush away our own sin as of being of no consequence. We think that God is all good and God has no desire to hold our sins against us and so we just flick them away as having no impact—thoroughly unaware of our own injustice to the other. We believe that in the end God will make everything right and we will live happily ever after. It's kind of beautiful to hope like that except that it is not what Jesus himself says or taught. You tear at the other, you destroy the other, you sunder unity where the Lord desires that all be one—and then you think that you die and go to heaven and sit at the same table with those you victimized and destroyed and think that's all there is too it? Think again. God's justice is real and God's justice is coming and he knows what our arrogance looks like even if we do not.

This is Advent. Time to do some soul searching. We will all celebrate the Lord's birthday in another month. But it will ring very empty indeed if we are not reconciled with those we have alienated. Wake up. You don't know how much time you have. Don't act like you have a lot of time. You don't know that. I surely don't. You know it was business as usual right up until it started raining when Noah built his ark. People just weren't paying attention. Are we? It's Advent. Let's get our house in order.

Put on the armor of light. A Christian must reckon himself undressed, if unarmed. The graces of the Spirit are this armor, to secure the soul from Satan's temptations, and the assaults of

this present evil world. Put on Christ. Put on the Spirit and grace of Christ, for sanctification. The Lord Jesus Christ must be put on as Lord. When we are up and ready, we are not to sit still, but let us walk. Christianity teaches us how to walk so as to please God, whoever sees us. Walk honestly as in the day; avoiding the works of darkness. Our great care must be to provide for our souls: but must we take no care about our bodies? Yes; but two things are forbidden. Perplexing ourselves with anxious, encumbering care; and indulging ourselves in irregular desires.