

THESE DAYS

I'm not old enough to know the reality of life during the 1918 influenza pandemic, World War II, or polio infections of the last century. But I do know the stories my family and others spoke about so often regarding these struggles. These events shaped and formed the characters, habits, and outlooks of everyone who survived them. A certain attitude was pervasive in all these conversations, mostly unspoken attitudes that were so assumed and expected they weren't named specifically. Whenever people spoke of resolutions to life's problems, the approach was broad and aimed to benefit the most. In the flu pandemic of 1918, communities set up their own hospitals to care for the sick, workforces to clean and disinfect public spaces, and volunteers to collect and bury the dead. These efforts weren't paid or profited from. In World War II, scores of people gave up careers and livelihoods to support and contribute to an effort to thwart the evil of fascism on a continent far from the safe confines of the U.S. People of every race, color, and creed sacrificed their steel products, tires, paper, time, and lives to help any way they could. They were defending certain ideals, even...when so many were being excluded from those dreams. Many suffered greatly in this mass sacrifice and not just the soldiers. There were no marches or protests (although there were legitimate reasons for some) obscuring the focus on issues that pertained to a world audience. That isn't to say that some very important issues were less important, it simply meant that a greater threat needed the attention of society. I also think that from the efforts of so many, people of color, genders, and creeds that a certain respect and credibility served to initiate real movements toward equality in progress today. The efforts to fight wars or pestilence took center stage.

I'm not sure where to begin here, but our world has changed. Some of it for the good and some not so much. Self-interests have replaced the **"common good"**. As a society, we have come to focus on individual desires as our "rights", and ignore the reality that one person's "rights" can easily infringe on another's when the understanding of sacrifice has been lost. This perspective has over-run the consciousness of society today and it is destroying us. We see it in the political arena and the issues of abortion and workplace equity. A major battle is soon to come as transgender rights threaten to destroy women's athletics. How can a world survive such self-centered efforts without a conversation of preserving the societies we all must live in? Where does it end?

I could go on and on about the conflicts between what one segment of society views as "rights" and how they affect others with similar ideas of their "rights". Most of the time, both are legitimate. The problem is, no one is listening to the other. We've become a large family "crammed in a small house with one bathroom." We've simply become a people who complain and draw "boundaries", daring others to cross them. Occasionally, someone does and a riot breaks out. Instead of gathering around a symbolic "dinner table" to discuss, we congregate in the back-yard to fight. We are a people of "us and them". This world and the struggle for universal freedom would not have survived the last century if not for a universal willingness to sacrifice for a greater cause. I am beginning to fear we won't survive this century (without a major cataclysmic event) because of our desire to have our own way.

In many ways, this struggle simply mirrors the paradox between human love and the ways of Agape, or Divine Love. It reveals the on-going struggle of original sin and **GOD's** desire to redeem

humanity. I look at the Church today, and I see the beautiful example of those devoted to bringing peace and comfort to the world. Those who live the **Beatitudes** and reflect the glory of **GOD** with their lives and the choices they make... the self-sacrificing they perform and the joy and peace they produce. Then I contrast this with the ever-increasing selfishness of those who live only for themselves while so many suffer, and I see a world darkening with despair and a loss of hope. This has always been the paradox and the balance so many have died for trying to tip the "scales" toward the Kingdom. It may be the "false" narrative of our communications, but it (humanity) appears to be leaning in the direction of darkness. I see a Church struggling to meet the needs of the poor and marginalized, producing burn-out in the few who seek to serve them. In our own parish, fairly active compared to many, we can see an aging volunteer (many over 60 years old) force gradually shrinking because so few are willing to give of their time and resources to evangelize and promote the values **Christ** asks us to share. We are too busy to form ourselves in the image of Christ through active study of His Word, and the prayer life necessary to manifest its meaning. Translation? We are becoming weak-minded Christians around the world, especially in this country so blessed by **GOD** with freedoms most of the world can only dream about.

I know this is harsh language. I never want to insult or make others feel as if their lives are lacking in meaning. The world abandoned this ambition long ago. I want to raise the bar and challenge everything to greater things, things that have real power and meaning for all. It is the challenge to reveal our **Lord** and **Savior** to the world we live in through **HIS** example of sacrifice and service to others. Meditate on what human existence would look like without **HIS** willingness to give **HIS** life for us? And when we come to this understanding, to realize what our world could be like if we follow suit?

It was not in **Jesus'** "self-interest" to suffer and die to atone for OUR sins. **HE** had a "right" to live. The only hope for our world, both today and for tomorrow, is to recapture the perspective of a Common Good, and what benefits the most...top to bottom and vice-versa. Logically, life cannot sustain everyone's individual desires. More often than not, these desires will trample those of another. Holy Scripture reveals the path to Holiness and the restoration of the Kingdom of **GOD** through our service to others. It may not be what we want to hear, but it is "established law" for Christians. My challenge is for all of us, especially myself. For young and old alike, "**Loving the Lord our God with ALL our heart, soul, mind and strength**" is a Commandment that is non-negotiable. If you are old, it is never too late to start. If you are young or raising children, realize that you are also building the society (good or bad) that your children will inherit and live in. The Church, as the deposit of Truth, is the responsibility of us all to promote and preserve. Don't make it the bottom of your priority. **Sacrifice** to make its influence felt throughout the world. Peace

Bless You All for all you do.

See You Soon!!!

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