

October 2, 2016

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

O Lord, violence and discord everywhere, but you do not intervene. And the Lord said, "The vision still has its time, presses on to fulfillment and will not disappoint; if it delays, wait for it." Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed.

Background on the Gospel

Good servants at that time did what they were told. They were "*due nothing*" for doing what was expected of them. Here can be seen the pun-oriented humor of Jesus exhibited in his native language, Aramaic. The servant who is '*due nothing*' is not a "*do nothing*" servant.

It's Depressing

I read an article this past week that was not humorous. It was titled, "Politics used to be fun. Now, it is depressing," by Jesuit Fr. Tom Reese in the National Catholic Reporter, 9/29/16. In it, Tom writes: "*This is a column I do not want to write. I am so sick of this election and the entire political process. Partisanship has become so bad that it blinds members of one party from any facts or views that are contrary to the party's. Politics just is not fun anymore. It is depressing.*"

The question I want to raise is, "*How do we maintain inner peace when we see our political system acting like it is? How do we keep from being brought down from seeing what is being brought down all around us?*"

Soothing Wisdom for Troubled Times

I would like to offer the following reflections as a meditation. It will not be about the tensions and dysfunction we see in our political system, it will be about the tensions we experience in ourselves as we look at this system.

Dominican, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, gave this talk a few years back, and it is particularly relevant to our topic. It was titled, "*Finding peace in troubled times.*" The following is a brief of that talk.

"Our power comes from the friction, from the tension, from the struggle which pushes us beyond our present self. Otherwise, we will settle into our personal self-serving ideology, our private theories which will always be smaller than God. It's only when we learn to face the splits, the divides, the tensions inside our own hearts that we will be able to look at other people with calm and tranquility. If we can be calm about our own splits and tensions, we can be at peace and see others in their goodness.

“When Thomas Merton fled the world to go to Gethsemane, it was because he saw a world filled with bad people. And he had to get away from them. He had to go to a nice little place, a Cistercian monastery, where he would be protected. But after years of struggling with his own demons, facing himself, looking in the mirror, he returned to the world to see that it is good.”

The Open Mind

Pema Chodron has this to say in her reflection on “The Open Mind”:

“We should never underestimate our low tolerance for discomfort. To stay with our vulnerability is news we can use. It cultivates loving-kindness and compassion even in all of our confusion and discomforts. It is only when we relate to others without moralizing harshness that we can let go of our negative patterns.

“When I was about six years old, I received an essential teaching from an old woman in the sun. I was walking by her house one day feeling lonely, unloved, and mad, kicking anything I could find. Laughing, she said to me, ‘*Little girl, don’t you go letting life harden your heart.*’ Right there I received the instruction: we can let the circumstances of our lives harden us so that we can become increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder and more open to what scares us. We always have this choice.

“An open heart and mind has sometimes been called the ‘soft spot,’ a place as vulnerable and tender as an open wound. It is equated in part with our ability to love. Even the most vicious animals love their offspring. The ‘soft spot’ is like a crack in the walls. With practice, we can learn to find this opening, that under the hardness of anxiety and panic, anger and resentment, there is the tenderness of genuine sadness.

“Jack Kornfield tells of witnessing this in Cambodia during the time of the Khmer Rouge. Fifty thousand people had become communists at gunpoint, threatened with death if they continued their old ways. In spite of the danger, a temple was established in the refugee camp, and twenty thousand people attended the opening ceremony. There were no lectures or prayers, but simply this continuous chanting: ‘*Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is an ancient and eternal law.*’ Thousands of people chanted and wept, knowing that the truth in these words was even greater than their suffering.’ The open mind has this kind of power. It will inspire and support us in good times and in bad. It reveals to us a wisdom and compassion we do not know we have - and desperately need.”

This is encouraging

The open mind is available to us all. When there is violence all around us, “the open mind” and “the tender heart” will maintain our inner peace during troubled times.

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