

January 28, 2018
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts

*Lifting our hearts and hands to help one another softens the human heart
and helps us be able to hear his voice*

What hardens our hearts?

The Responsorial Psalm today tells us we can't hear his voice with hardened hearts. So the question we have to ask then is what is it that hardens our hearts? Hate and anger, fear and despair. Anything that kills the spirit of hope and compassion hardens the human heart - whether it be to our person or even through the hate speeches so prevalent in Television programing.

What softens our hearts?

What helps relieve the stress that hardens our hearts?

- † Lifting our hearts and hands to help one other
- † Offering compassion and hope to each other
- † Doing whatever it takes to help reduce the impact of frightening and angry voices

Isn't this what Jesus had in mind when he said: "Do to others what you would have them do to you:" "Forgive, forgive them. They know not what they do:" "If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, go first and be reconciled to him, and then bring your gift to the altar"; "Love one another as I have loved you;" "the Beatitudes" and the like.

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This is true not only of our Christian culture, but of other cultures as well

Take for instance the culture of Islam. I have here a magazine titled, "*A Matter of Spirit*" (AMOS) whose whole focus in this issue is to understand Islam. AMOS is sponsored by and affiliated to 23 religious orders of sisters and priests around the Pacific Northwest which speaks well to its accuracy and integrity.

One of its articles was written by Dominican Sr. Susan Van Baalen who has a doctorate from Georgetown University with a concentration in Islamic Studies. It is entitled, "Understanding Islam". She writes: "Almsgiving is a ritual prescribed in the Quran. Muslims contribute 2.5% of their annual worth after setting aside funds for family obligations and debts. Donations are distributed first among the

local poor before reaching out to the global community. Purification of wealth ensures one does not become so attached to money that s/he neglects the needs of others."

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Afeefa Syeed who has worked for 25 years in the area of social justice, gender inclusion, countering extremism, and peace education quotes Muhammad in the Quran: "Whosoever witnesses an injustice, he or she must try to fix it with their hands. If they are not able, then with their tongue. If that is also not possible, then in their hearts – they should pray for it to be gone and feel the hurt of its existence. Oh you who believe! Be standard-bearers for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your own kin, whether any be rich or poor. Follow not distracting lusts, lest you swerve, and if you distort justice or decline to do justice, God is well acquainted with all that you do."

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It is helpful to know that American Muslims raised more than \$150,000 to help rebuild the churches that were burned across the South around 2015. American Muslims responded to the Flint water crisis by donating 100,000 bottles of water to families and children in Flint, Michigan. Almost 100 American Muslims volunteers went to Louisiana to help with flood relief. Tens of thousands of American Muslims serve in our country's military.

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The Qur'an says:

"Be upright for God, bearers of witness with justice, and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety, and be careful for your duty to God; surely God is aware of what you do. God has promised to those who believe and do good deed (that) they shall have forgiveness award." (Surah 5:7-5)

The Gospel of Matthew says:

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to them. "You shall love the Lord, your God, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."

The Golden Rule

The Golden Rule is perhaps the most consistent, prevalent, and universal ethical principle in history. It is found worldwide throughout cultures, religions, secular philosophies, and indigenous traditions. For instance:

Buddhism: *"Treat not others in ways you yourself would find hurtful."*

Confucianism: *"One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct . . . loving kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself."*

Taoism: *"Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss."*

Sikhism: *"I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed I am a friend to all."*

Christianity: *"In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."*

Unitarianism: *"We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part."*

Native Spirituality: *"We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive."*

Zoroastrianism: *"Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself."*

Jainism: *"One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated."*

Judaism: *"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary."*

Islam: *"Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself."*

Baha'i Faith: *"Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself."*

Hinduism: *"This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you."*

We all know how religion has been twisted to serve one's own purposes. We need not look at other religious traditions to see this. Christianity itself has its own sinful history. We are all a cry for help; we are all in need of each other. Let not hateful voices harden our hearts - whether in our company or through mass media.

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