

January 1, 2016
Feast of the Solemnity of Mary

“The Lord bless you and keep you! The Lord let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you! The Lord look upon you kindly and give you peace!”

When we don't let our blind passions push our buttons, we can see the Lord's face shining upon us and being gracious to us! We can see the Lord looking upon us kindly and giving us peace.

Pushing one's buttons

I read an article some years ago which from The Religious News Service titled: “*Membership plummets after pastor preaches whole world will be saved.*” In part, it said,

“A high-profile evangelical pastor lost 90 percent of his 5,000 member congregation after preaching that Christ died for the sins of the world, and therefore the whole world will be saved. This went against evangelical orthodoxy that salvation requires personal response to the message of Christ. Oral Roberts U in Tulsa banned his church buses from campus and national evangelical church leaders condemned him.”

This extreme reaction seems to have said more about the 5,000 than it did about the pastor. What he said pushed their buttons, and they gave into their emotions, leaving them rigid and unable to receive the Lord's blessing. Whenever our buttons are pushed and we give in to our emotions, we become rigid and unable to receive the Lord's blessing.

It's happened before

Catholic vs. Non-Catholic:

We all know the tragic events that have happened over the centuries between different Christian denominations - the religious wars, killings, leaving the churches so rigid they missed the Lord's blessings and knew no peace.

Catholic vs. Catholic:

We all know the tragic fights between conservatives and liberals that have infected the church since the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960's, leaving the members of the church so rigid they missed the Lord's blessings and knew no peace.

Politics vs. Politics:

We all know the tragic events and violent arguments that are increasingly occurring in our country today, leaving it so rigid it is missing the Lord's blessing and knows no peace.

Whenever our buttons are pushed and we give into emotions, we become rigid and miss the blessing God has in mind for us - and we know no peace. Of course, belief systems can be accompanied by strong emotion. It's just that we need to take care that we not be blinded by them and become rigid and miss the Lord's blessing. Jesus was never defensive about his beliefs. He just pushed the buttons of those whose passions were blind to show them where they were rigid and unfree.

Unlocking rigidity

Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr makes this observation about blind rigidity and offers this simple suggestion to become less so:

“It doesn't help that our brains have evolved to hold onto negative thoughts like Velcro, and let the positive thoughts slip off like Teflon. To retain a positive experience, we have to intentionally hold onto it for at least 15 seconds to allow it to imprint on your brain. (e.g. BALANCE) We have to deliberately, consciously choose to love and not hate. Because we have not been taught this, we have decent people in our country, in our political parties, and even in leadership positions in our churches who are much more at home with hate than they are with love. And they do not even know it.

“Spirituality is whatever it takes to keep our hearts space balanced - open. If we don't have some spiritual practice that keeps our hearts open in our “hells,” we're going to become grumpy old men or hateful old women, and by the last third of life, negativity is all we will have left. But sooner or later, by God's patience, many of us eventually fall into love and learn to draw our life from that infinite source. The nature of love and the nature of God are the same thing.”

Let's practice becoming less rigid

Think of someone towards whom you have negative feelings and think positively about them for 15 seconds. OK? Are you ready?

Start

Thank you. Now you may have discovered that you may have to do this more than once! Of course, that is normal. What this is doing is developing new neuro-groove patterns in our brain to balance out the old negative ones. It takes practice. This is what we mean by spiritual practice. We don't think our way into new ways of living, we live into them. It's like physical workouts. This is a spiritual workout - spiritual aerobics. We need to keep repeating this

exercise until our positive responses come as easily, and eventually, more easily than the negative.

Can't you just hear the Lord encouraging us and saying:

“If you don't let your blind passions push your buttons, I can bless you and keep you! I can let my face shine upon you and be gracious to you! I can look upon you kindly and give you peace”

If you're looking for a N.Y. resolution, try this one:

*I'll not let anyone push my buttons -- make me rigid and unfree --
and trick me into missing the Lord's blessing*

Happy New Year!