

Impossibles

It's really good to be back home with you!

These past three months were at once super long and yet went by really fast too.

Thank you to all who kept our church and our community running so smoothly and continuing the many ministries that we have.

And thanks to all of you for the great gift this sabbatical has been...

I hope I come home to you a better person and a better priest.

When I'm on sabbatical, I like to travel to our sister churches here on Oahu, and did just that a few weeks ago.

During the homily, the priest was talking about how hard it is to take the Bible seriously in these modern times.

Imagine, he said, if after the service, we broke up into groups and went out two by two into the neighborhood, knocking on doors and offering to heal the sick and raise the dead.

Why, they'd either look at us funny, slam the door or call the cops!

I'm wondering what my brother priest will say today when the invitation of Jesus is not just to offer some healing but to walk on water!

And I couldn't help but to think, isn't it precisely the impossibles that our faith calls us to, and if we run from that call, do we do so at our peril?

Just look at where we are today.

Gracious, I was hoping my first homily back with you would be some funny stories about the adventure in Africa and some lighthearted commentary on the readings!

But the headlines won't let me go there this morning...

For those of us in the over 60 crowd, it's like we've entered a wormhole and emerged right smack dab back in the middle of the Cuban Missile Crisis — only

instead of having two relatively sober and thoughtful men standing between nuclear holocaust and cooler heads prevailing, we are in a sort of fun house mirror world where two men-children with vast egos and little governing experience yell increasingly crazy things that threaten to take the whole world into the abyss.

And while our human survival instinct is powerful and old, while the most natural reaction is to batten down the hatches and look out only for those near and dear to us, our faith calls us to do the impossible, to get out of the boat of our securities and to walk on the choppy waters of peace and reconciliation.

Our faith calls us to look deeper than the fear mongering, to look beneath the mere surface of things, to remember that what we call good and evil is very subjective indeed, and that we are frequently wrong in choosing which is which.

Our faith calls us out of saber rattling nationalism to remember that humanity is the steward, not the creator of this good earth; that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God — that we have no right to kill that which God has created.

Our faith calls us to remember that “it is not only among the sweet and the kind that we discover holiness; but that the morally disfigured, the liars and lurkers and murderers, they too are destined to walk on water.

That the people we consider unsavory — gang bangers, drug lords, terrorists, Neo-Nazis, politicians, Kim Jun Un, they too are destined to walk on water, because the redeeming mercy of God is not limited to the select or the few, but is stuffed into every atom, every inch, of this good creation.

It is grace that turns sinners into saints, and makes every creature glow with the light of divinity.” Cummins, *If Only We Can See*, 410-11, paraphrased.

Meaning, with headlines screaming about the U.S. being “locked and loaded” for war, with North Korea threatening our friends in Guam, it really is time to take a step away from the brink, and remember, that if only we will say no to war and violence and hate, all things can work together for the good.

What the mystics teach us is that “when people become too intent on separating good and evil, desirable and undesirable, profitable and useless, they are immersed in illusion; their view of reality is perverted.

They can no longer see the deep, underlying connection of opposites — they obsess over superficial separation.

Seeing this underlying unity of all things, especially the unity of those things we so quickly call good and bad, is the key to truth; for it allows us to finally understand that with God, all things are good and just and right; no matter that we insist that some things are right and others wrong." Merton, *Spiritual Master*, 283, paraphrased.

In these days of escalating tensions with a very real threat of a profoundly destructive nuclear war, what impossibles is our faith calling us to?

Over 60 years ago, facing a similar potential catastrophe, the monk, Fr. Thomas Merton, said this about the Christian response to nuclear war:

"I do not mean to say that you have to swim out to nuclear submarines carrying a banner, but it is absolutely necessary to take a serious and articulate stand on the question of nuclear war.

The passivity, the apparent indifference, the incoherence of so many Christians on this issue, and worse still, the active belligerency of some religious spokesmen, especially in this country, is rapidly becoming one of the most frightful scandals in the history of Christendom."

A Southern Baptist minister, Jim Jeffress, who heads up a Dallas mega-church, is making the rounds on the news shows this week.

According to this minister:

"When it comes to how we should deal with evil doers, the Bible, in the book of Romans, is very clear: God has endowed rulers full power to use whatever means necessary — including war — to stop evil. In the case of North Korea, God has given Trump authority to take out Kim Jong-Un."

That's not a Christian response to the threats facing us in these days, and it is a false and indeed satanic misreading of sacred scripture.

Anything that promotes war or killing or hate is always from the evil one, never from the God who loves us so much that he dies for the very best of us and for the very worst of us.

As Fr. Merton reminds us,

"Christ Our Lord did not come to bring peace to the world as a kind of spiritual tranquilizer.

He brought to His disciples a vocation and a task, to struggle in the world of violence, to establish His peace not only in their own hearts, but in society itself."

Therefore, "the Christian is one whose life has sprung from a particular spiritual seed: the blood of the martyrs who, without offering forcible resistance, laid down their lives rather than submit to the unjust laws that demanded an official religious cult of the Emperor as God.

That is to say, the Christian is bound, like the martyrs, to obey God rather than the state whenever the state tries to usurp powers that do not and cannot belong to it."

Meaning, the power to give and to take life belongs to God alone.

That is true when the dead are solely members of the military and it is especially true in the context of a war in Korea, which by definition will kill thousands if not millions of ordinary people.

So let us pray for peace.

Let us call or write to those in power and urge peace, reminding those who claim Christ as their Lord what that means in practice and in fact.

Let us join in love and solidarity with one another and take on the impossible that our faith demands of us: trusting that in faith, mountains can be moved, water can be walked upon, the sick healed, the dead raised to life, and sanity restored to those about to cause so much needless suffering.

+amen

