

## Demonizing Others

We are living in times when there is a daily barrage against those who are minorities or immigrants or some other vulnerable group.

Last week some cops in Phoenix threatened to shoot a black family who's 4 year old allegedly took a doll from a dollar store.

Then there was the quote from a pastor/detective who called for, in a sermon no less, the execution of all people who are of different sexual orientations.

Which was followed by President Trump's tweet to round up millions of undocumented families, and deport them within the week.

It all falls under the heading of Demonizing Others.

Sad to say but both secular government and organized religion has for years, even centuries, encouraged, explicitly or implicitly, hatred of and self-hatred among, those who are different, whether those differences are race, creed, marital status, sexual orientation; the list is endless, isn't it?

When we do such things in the name of God, we commit blasphemy, we betray our faith, because our faith is founded on one single command and no other: Love one another!

You only have to peruse the headlines to realize that we are in profound need of metanoia, of entering into the larger mind, which, when we do, becomes the opportunity for God's spirit to open our eyes to the sheer joy and beauty of God's diverse creation.

In our blindness we bow down before the strong, the rich and the famous, all while God is totally smitten with those who are different, marginalized and vulnerable.

Today's readings are all about these truths.

For those who say you must dot this "i" or cross this "t" to be loved by God, God says,

"I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, "Here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name." Isa. 65:1-2.

God is a God who loves all human beings.

Paul's letter to the Galatians this morning drives that message home.

In Paul's day, humanity is divided between Jews and Gentiles; slaves and free; male and female: those distinctions pretty much covering the map, distinctions that Paul once believed were heaven sent, yet, once Jesus knocks him on his backside and blinds him, Paul joyously comes to see that:

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for all are one in Christ Jesus."

Today we might add: there is no longer Catholic or Protestant, gay or straight, uptown or downtown, but all are one in Christ Jesus, precisely

because God is a God who “seeks those who do not ask, who is found by those who don’t seek him.”

Which is a message organized religion often runs from so fast you’d think our pants are on fire!

Imagine the implications!

No more “us against them,” no more gloating over the “saved and the damned,” and worst of all, no one is left to look down upon!

No wonder we so often run so fast!

It’s an outrage!

And yet, truth be told, it’s also a relief.

Because down deep, in our heart of hearts, we know that all of our divisions, all of our categories and condemnations, are lies.

Our love affair with dividing ourselves from one another is a glaring symptom of the evil in the world that is so much worse, that goes so much deeper, than our individual peccadillos.

There is something in this fallen world that distorts everything, and we need deliverance.

That deliverance is what Jesus brings through the Holy Spirit because Christ conquers the demons, those forces of evil in the world that alienate us from one another, that alienate us even from our own selves.

Those demons want us to believe that God is all about a life lived in a straight jacket of rules, regulations and narrow expectations; but God's dream is that we be freely and fully human, that we glory in the rainbows of creative diversity.

And all those folks who look to Leviticus to justify their misogyny and homophobia?

I guess they missed what Paul is saying:

That "before faith came, we were imprisoned under the law. The law was our disciplinarian until Christ came... But now, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." Gal. 3:24f

Meaning, the law is replaced with love!

Meaning, the only judge is Jesus - our task is to love, period.

And yet we live in a world filled not only with personal demons, but in a world where social demons are Legion too.

They travel by many names: war, injustice, bigotry, hatred, sexism, poverty, and slavery to money.

And so the mission of Christ is not only about healing individuals, "it's also about delivering the whole world from our enslavement to the corrupt systems which crush and kill." K. Leech, *Collected Works* (paraphrased).

That's why today's gospel takes us to the tombs, where a once possessed man now sits at the feet of Jesus.

The irony is that the townsfolk, who don't see themselves as demon possessed, are scared to death by the healing.

They are terrified by the healing that Jesus brings, and they beg him to leave; because their whole society is indeed ruled by demons, and they love their demons far more than they love freedom.

Sound familiar?

Just listen to the blowback when someone talks of reducing funds to the Pentagon, or welcoming immigrants or just **talking** about reparations for African Americans, whose enslavement was key to building this country, and when slavery ended, who endured years of Jim Crow and other systematic efforts to keep them, as a people, impoverished.

Why?

Because we too love our demons.

But Jesus is stronger than any demon; he is always ready to free us from their snares.

"Christ comes to shatter whatever chains people to lives of denial, shame, self-hate; to prejudice and pride and greed.

Christ is here, now, especially when we gather as church, to carry out God's saving grace, a grace that moves quietly, in seeming weakness, a grace that will one day cover the earth.

This is our destiny, this is the goal of our faith!" D. Lose paraphrased.

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”

Isn't that our question too?

In the weeks to come, Jesus invites tax collectors and prostitutes to dinner.

He welcomes people whom no self-respecting holy man would be caught dead with, pointing the way to this truth:

In him, we are all one: Christian and Muslim, Black, White, Asian, Pacific Islander, gay and straight.

In him, all of our categories are shattered — so that lo and behold — the marvelous diversity of humanity — created and blessed and adored by God — can sparkle as the apple of God's eye.

All of which leads to the most astounding truth of all, that the unity that binds everything on earth is then grasped by a unity which binds heaven to earth.

The spiritual and the material, the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, are all united in Christ.

“Through Christ, the temple of God is **humanity**, so that each ounce of matter belongs to God and is fulfilled in God.

Each instant of time is God's time, and is fulfilled in God's eternity, because the Holy Spirit, with a smile of joy, touches all things — revealing humanity as the most precious stone within God's precious temple.” Fr. A. Schmemmann, *For The Life of the World*, paraphrased.

When we exclude or vilify or condemn, we forget this essential truth of our faith.

But when we work in solidarity with the least, the lost and the left behind, then we find ourselves marching in the magnificent parade of God, one which sweeps up everything and everyone into the unimaginable glory of God!

By gathering all of creation and uniting it with the divine, Jesus begins the banquet promised so long ago by the prophet Isaiah:

“On this mountain, the Lord ... will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, of well-aged wines, and he will destroy the shroud that is cast over all peoples, he will swallow up death forever.

And God will wipe away the tears from all faces, for the Lord has spoken.” Isa. 25:6-8

Thanks be to God!

+amen