

## CHAPLAIN'S BULLETIN AUGUST 14, 2022



Dear Folks,

Last year and this year, my retreat was about going through Pope Saint John Paul's book "Sign of Contradiction." This book is the text of talks he gave at a retreat for Pope Saint Paul VI and his cardinals in 1976.

He talks about encountering Jesus, who is a "sign of contradiction" or a "sign that will be contradicted" according to the prophecy of Simeon in the temple (Lk 2:34 the Presentation in the Temple). This sign calls for a response, and this response shows who we are and forms us. Whenever people encounter Jesus, they are tested.

The glory of the universe points to the glory of God, but there is an ambiguity. In the midst of the beauty and goodness, there is ugliness and harm. We decide how we will respond, and the Holy Father says it is not determined by the proportions of good and bad we have experienced, but something within us, perhaps grace. (Further reflection on this can be found in Victor Frankl's book "Man's Search for Meaning").

We go to the story of Adam and Eve: Satan presents God as a rival, someone trying to keep them from the best possible life, and Satan presents himself as a Prometheus figure. In Greek mythology, the gods of Olympus decided to keep fire from humans, so they didn't rise too high. Prometheus defied the gods and brought people fire, enabling civilization. We can see that the devil has had considerable success in convincing people that sin will bring us a better life. I have heard practicing Catholics describing a food as being so delicious it was sinful. C.S. Lewis' book "The Screwtape Letters" develops this idea in some interesting ways.

Satan is, of course lying. The world was created according to the Word, and Satan brings anti-Word and anti-Gospel. This leads us to anti-Love. Jesus stands in contradiction to this. Jesus' love for the Father and His Love for us overcame His natural self-love, so He was willing to die on the cross for us. "The Cross justifies us before God and justifies God before us." If Jesus believed it was worth that to save us, how can we say anything is too much to ask of us to follow Him? Our complaints against God fade away in the face of the cross. "God wants for man the joy of choosing God, the choice that suffering teaches us to make."

Jesus reveals to us the meaning of what it is to be human. As we seek to understand ourselves, we start with "Who is Jesus?" Jesus is the one who gave Himself in love, at the cost of great suffering. We exercise our humanity most fully when we choose to give ourselves in love, even at great cost.

Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind (John 9:39)." In a dark room everything looks the same. When a light is shone, we can distinguish. In our Gospel this Sunday (Luke 12: 49-53), Jesus warns that He will bring division. The more Jesus clarifies, the more people will choose for or against Him. When we truly encounter Jesus, life is different. Be warned.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim