

## Chaplain's Bulletin April 23, 2023



Dear Folks,

This is the second of a series of articles on building a less violent world. If we want a better world, we need to have an idea of what “better” means. You may think this is obvious, but I challenge you to think again. What seems obviously true to me might seem obviously false to someone else.

The book “Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong” by William Kilpatrick tells of values clarification in some school programs, where they teach children to form their own value system. He mentioned how shocked teachers were by the value systems they came up with. “The Abolition of Man” by C. S. Lewis describes how, back in the 1940’s, people were already working to deconstruct our value system without considering the results (“They laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in their midst”). Since then things have gotten stranger.

Imagine a society where most people have a fuzzy, undefined, inconsistent view of right and wrong, and when something happens that feels wrong to them, they scream, and if they can get enough people to scream with them, they can dominate the conversation. Now stop imagining, because I think we have arrived. Why are we surprised that such a society has so much violence? If people excuse violence when they are sympathetic to the cause, why should they be surprised that people will use violence on the other side? If we believe in standards of behavior, it needs to be consistent with our allies and our opponents. It is easy to call out our opponents; it is more important to call out our allies and remind them they are hurting the cause.

When we disagree and are angry, we need to reject violence. We need to reject name calling. If we need to avoid reading people’s hearts, and saying because they disagree with us, they don’t care about goodness. If we are frustrated that they reject our position, we need to make a better case for our position. We may think we’ve made a good enough case to convince any reasonable person, but they clearly don’t think so. We can insult the other people, or we can make a better case. We need to do things that will move the conversation forward.

So often we see people talking past each other. When I see someone saying, “I long for a country where people love their children more than their guns.” I know that moves us away from anything constructive. The very people they most want to convince are going to read that and say, “they have not even tried to understand our point of view. We need guns to protect our children.” On the other hand, simply posting, “What part of ‘shall not be infringed’ don’t you understand?” is not going to help. It reinforces their opponents’ belief that they don’t care about stopping violence. Wouldn’t it be so much more helpful to make a better case, that our proposed solution would actually make things better. Once again, it may seem obvious to us, but the opposite might be obvious to other intelligent people of good will. Our reasoning seems to us to be more reasonable, but we all have an unconscious thumb on the scale pushing us in that direction. It will take much patient, persistent work to develop common messages about behaviors that build a better society.

Imagine a society where parents, teachers, entertainers, political leaders, and church leaders all reinforced a common message to reject violence and destruction to make our points, to build constructive and respectful dialog, to value growing in virtue over gratifying desire, to value problem solving over complaining, and to respect the law and law enforcement? Would that be a less violent society?

Blessings,

Fr. Jim