

Chaplain's Bulletin June 9, 2024



Dear Folks,

This Sunday's Gospel deals with people that Jesus could not convince.

Mark 3:20-35 Jesus is casting out demons, and His opponents claimed that He was possessed and that he drove out demons “by the power of the prince of demons.” Jesus shows how illogical that is and warned against blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It seems from the context that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is refusing to see.

Helen Keller said, “The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.” Some will not see because they don’t want to and will say or do anything to defend against a new idea. Those who refuse to see cannot be forced to see. If even Jesus couldn’t convince them, we are not going to do better than Jesus.

I continue to be concerned about the state of conversation in society today. There is a lot of interaction, but not a lot of understanding. The chasm between sides seems to be growing wider, and the hostility between them growing fiercer. I chose not to include examples but ask you to think of some from your experience. I bet you can.

I've noticed that what we say sounds more convincing to us than it does to the people who disagree with us. There seem to be many occasions when someone presents his argument and ends with the triumphant equivalent of “checkmate. Case closed” and the other person says, “No, not even close.” Some are not convinced because we didn't make a case that spoke to their point of view, and if we learn more about their point of view we can try again and maybe succeed. Usually there are some bits of information that support one point of view, and other bits of information that support the other point of view. We tend to put more weight on what supports our narrative. Some people, it seems hammer the details in their favor and ignore the details against. I can't tell if they are doing it on purpose.

At some point, we need to realize we aren't going to make progress and need to give up. Jesus spoke of shaking the dust from our feet and moving on (Matt 10:12; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5 and 10:11). Sometimes it takes a while for a new idea to take root, to mature, and to grow. We can't generally change the basic architecture of our thinking in a minute; sometimes it takes years. I've caught myself getting angry when I think someone is not trying to understand. I need to check myself. First of all, they may be trying. Second, getting angry is a futile waste of energy at best, and destructive at worst. I just need to accept that I can do what I can do.

I think it is critical to be realistic about what the situation is and how much we can do about it. There is a lot of bad thinking, bad logic, and bad ideas, and it's going to be that way for the foreseeable future. We need to resign ourselves to the fact that we can't fix it, but maybe we can make it a smidge better. If we can get someone to think something they've never thought before, ask a question that they've never asked before, look at things from a different angle, that moves us forward.

If others hurl abuse, call people names, and get nasty while we respond calmly, respectfully, and persistently, over time those who are open will see where wisdom lies.

One final thought: let us all be carefully on guard against our own human tendency to refuse to see the truth. None of us are immune.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim