

Chaplain's Bulletin May 5, 2024



Dear Folks,

Our first reading this Sunday from Acts 10 shows St. Peter dealing with a major issue in the first century Church: whether righteousness (being in right relationship with God) comes through works of the Law of Moses or through faithfulness to Jesus (spoiler alert: faithfulness).

In our Gospel from John 15, we see a major emphasis on how to be faithful is to love one another. A temptation is to respond with “now I know what I need to know; this is simple.”

Not so fast. In theology, I read a book called “Situation Ethics” by Joseph Fletcher. He insisted that there should be only one law, the law of love, because any other law, any other ethical principle would sooner or later conflict with the law of love. As I kept reading, I realized that he was presuming that anyone who looked at a given situation would know what was the loving thing to do. Studying history and philosophy should show us that what seems obvious to us now was unthinkable in ancient times. Looking at modern discourse we can see that many people have opposite positions and are sure that their position is true, right, and obvious.

“Love” is a word we use so much it is easy to overestimate how well we understand the challenge. There are some major issues we must tackle:

1. What is love? Christianity teaches that it is not a feeling, but a decision to seek the good of others, even at a cost to oneself (the greatest act of love is “to lay down one’s life for one’s friends [John 15:13]).”
2. What is the good? Is it getting what we desire when we desire and how we desire? Or is there a good that is more profound, and that is to be discovered and that we are to grow into seeking? Such a good involve virtues being encouraged and incentivized by a healthy society.
3. How do we achieve it? Lenin, Stalin and Mao murdered tens of millions of people insisting that this would serve the greater good, but they brought about enormous misery instead. If we agree that we want an end to gun violence, we must still ask if a given gun control legislation will make people safer or less safe? Are there other things we can do? If we agree we want to help the environment, we are left with questions: does switching to electric cars help or hurt the environment? Does less drilling for oil in the U.S. help ore hurt? Does the benefit outweigh the harm? In Ann Garrido’s wonderful book “Redeeming Conflict” talks of “undoing the knot of intention.” Good intentions don’t necessarily produce good results.
4. How can we, a sinful people, do better? Christians know that we cannot overcome temptation by our own strength. It is only in our union with Jesus that it becomes possible. With His grace, however, we can do great things. With prayer, sacraments, and penance, we can open ourselves more and more to His presence so we can have the humility to see where we fall short, and the wisdom and strength to move forward.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim