

Commentary for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Freedom from Hatred



Today is the tenth anniversary of one of the worst days in the history of the United States. It still makes our blood boil to think of all the innocent people who will killed by the terrorists in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. Many in America, sadly, have responded to hate with hate, to anger with anger. We do need to defend ourselves from terrorists. But we also need to realize that anger can often be misguided. It can turn into hatred. It often can be responsible for people acting in ways that certainly are not the ways of the Lord.

By a complete co-incidence, the readings today speak about anger and hatred.

I would like to frame this homily around four images: the first is a comic called a Rose is a Rose. The second is a big expensive yacht, the third is the cross, and the fourth is a visit of a young man to a dying elderly man.

First of all the cartoon. Rose, the mom of the family is pictured in the first panel as sitting in a dungeon with a large ball and chain clamped to her leg. She is angry. There is a dark cloud over her head. In the second panel her expression changes and the dark cloud is replaced with the word 'Sigh'. In the third panel the dungeon has been transformed into a rainbow with birds singing, and butterflies flapping. The ball and chain are gone and Rose is dancing with a big smile on her face. In the fourth panel Rose goes up to her husband, Jimbo, who is engrossed in his newspaper, and tells him, "Well, it wasn't easy, but I have decided to forgive you."

Who really benefitted from the forgiveness? Was it Jimbo.....or was it Rose? It was Rose whose anger had imprisoned her, whose anger had turned her world black. It was Rose whose upset was a ball and chain around her.

The second image is the big expensive yacht. A number of years ago I used to go scuba diving with some friends just off of the Island of San Salvador, a small island of the Bahamas that claims to be the site of Columbus' landing in the Western Hemisphere. San Salvador has a small harbor mainly for scuba boats and fishing boats. Sometimes, though, there is a large yacht tied up to the dock. The yacht would seem to take up a quarter of the harbor. One day as we were leaving for a dive, one of the bigger yachts began pulling away from the pier. But there was a problem: Someone forgot to untie one of the lines from the dock. The results was that the yacht could not pull away. The captain gunned the engines, and the back end of the ship was torn off.

That ship was large and powerful, but something was holding it back, something was causing it to destroy itself. That's what hatred does. That's what the refusal to forgive does to us. It destroys us. There is not a person who has not been offended by many people in many different ways. We harbor anger and let it develop into hatred. And do you know what happens? It holds us back. "But, Father, you don't know what so and so did to me." You are right, I don't know. Nor do you know what another so and so did to me. But how can I progress in Christianity if I refuse to let go of the dock that my anger is tied to. "Well, I am going to take this anger to the grave, someone might say." That will really fix that person who hurt you, won't it. Hatred will consume us in the same way it consumed that servant in today's Gospel reading who had been forgiven a great debt but who was still furious with another servant who owed him a mere trifling.

The third image I present to you is the cross. Wednesday is the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. The cross is not jewelry. The cross is a reminder of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. The cross is a reminder of the Gospel of the Lord. St. Paul tells Timothy, "If I do not preach the gospel of Christ, then the cross loses its power." The Gospel of Christ demands forgiveness. It demands the sacrifice of that grudge that we actually enjoy harboring. The Gospel of Christ demands forgiveness when we have been offended. The Gospel of Christ demands our living the condition of the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." The Gospel of Christ is not easy, it is out and out tough. But by putting our hatred to death, we give life to our love and more importantly, by putting our hatred to death, we give life to his love.

The final image I want to share with you is one of the story of Chris Carrier and David McCalister. Chris Carrier, a 32 year old Christian minister, visited David McCalister, an elderly man in his 70's on his death bed at the time. Twenty two years before this Chris, a ten year old, was brutalized by David. The details are not necessary, but they are the worst, perhaps the least of which was that Chris

was blinded in one eye. A month before the visit, a detective finally got David to admit that he was the criminal who had done such atrocious things to Chris. It appears that the man only admitted it when he was assured that the statute of limitations had run out--so even his motives were not the most pure. How did Chris react? Did he let David know how difficult his childhood and teenage years had been since that terrible day? Did he speak about the dreams that were destroyed by this horrible man? No, none of this. Chris had been asked if he could forgive David. He responded that he had forgiven him many years ago. That was why Chris had no difficulty in caring for David in the convalescent home, where he became a regular visitor, where he considered the man who caused him so much pain his friend. Because Chris forgave, he was able to grow into an outstanding man of God. Because Chris followed one of Jesus's most difficult demands, the call to forgive those who have offended us, Chris brought Jesus to this nasty old man. Chris gave us an example what Jesus demands. Freed from anger, freed from grudges, freed from hatred, Chris learned to enjoy the love of the Lord and to give this love to others.

Should we go on hating the terrorists who caused our country so much pain ten years ago? No. We hate the deed, but not the people. We hate the forces of evil causing so many deaths throughout the world. But we don't hate the individuals. We can't hate and be followers of Christ.

Is there someone whom you or I hate today? Was there a situation from many years ago that has had a negative impact on our lives? The gospel for today says, "Let go. Let go of the battle stories. Let go of the hatred." This hatred has turned our lives into a prison. It has been the rope that held us back. We have suffered enough from the past. We are called today into the joy of the Lord. This aspect of the cross is the sacrifice of our well reasoned grudges.

The result of the sacrifice is to live in the freedom of the daughters and sons of the Lord.

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