

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Apr 21st 2016

I have often felt blessed to come from a family of storytellers. Family history was strongly emphasized during my formative years, especially by my mother. I am a member of a “tribe” of Carneys and Barretts; I was born into a story whose history long predates me. Even today I can recite some of the classic “stories” of my family’s history – my father’s Irish and Hungarian ancestors settling in Idaho; my grandfathers’ premature deaths; my mother’s memories of Civil Rights-era New Orleans and her Coke with Elvis Presley. Given the historical memories that shaped my youth, it is perhaps not surprising that I ended up pursuing a Ph.D. on the history of the church!

Today’s first reading reminds us that the narrative arc of our own Christian story goes way back. Our first reading gives us Paul’s opening speech in Acts. It is revealing that Paul’s first words do not concern Jesus himself, but rather the classic story of Israel’s salvation history – God’s liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery; God’s gifts of the Promised Land, Judges, Samuel, Saul and David; and the final preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. Even Jesus the Savior enters the world as a part of a much larger story; Jesus’s story only makes sense in light of the larger narrative arc of God’s saving work with Israel. John’s gospel today echoes this theme of fulfillment. Jesus’s betrayal is foretold in the Psalms, and his exalted identity as I AM unmistakably echoes YHWH’s famous revelation to Moses in Exodus 3:14.

In the modern world it is easy to see ourselves as “inventors” of our identities. The future is ours for the making; the past and tradition are dispensable. But as Christians we are “not our own creators.” As Paul himself famously said to a small group of Jews and Gentiles in Rome, we are “grafted” onto the story of Israel and God’s saving work in Jesus (Romans 11). This Easter season, let us recall with gratitude our insertion into the rich family history of this ancient Judeo-Christian tribe.

April 29, 2016

by Jan Schnack

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[click here for photo and information about the writer](#)

Memorial of Saint Catherine of Siena, Virgin and Doctor of the Church

Lectionary: 289

Acts 15:22-31

Psalm 57:8-9, 10 and 12

John 15:12-17

Daily Easter Prayer

Celebrating Easter Home

Weekly Guide for Daily Prayer

An Easter Blessing

Easter Joy in Everyday Life

Jesus said to his disciples: “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:12-13.

One of the treasures that has come into my life since converting to Catholicism in 2002 has been getting to know our brothers and sisters in Christ that have gone before us, the Saints. Today is no exception. Saint Catherine of Siena has been a wonderful role model for me. Through her life, we have the opportunity to witness what it looks like to love as Jesus loves. Throughout her short life, she lived serving others humbly. She helped the poor and the ill both in hospitals and homes.

I have worked in Creighton’s College of Nursing for 15 years, and have looked to St. Catherine as our Patronage Saint for sick people, sicknesses and nurses. St. Catherine became very near and dear to my heart when I went through my training in an Omaha hospital in the role of Chaplain. It was my desire to love others as Jesus loves us. One evening I was on-call at the hospital and was paged early in the shift. “Mary” had presented in the emergency room and her diagnosis was that she only had a few hours before she would die.

Her family started to call family and friends and the rest of the evening was spent saying good-bye. After arriving to the room and speaking with Mary and her family, I asked the family if it would be

meaningful for them to pray. I then learned that they did not want prayers and they were agnostic. Throughout the evening before Mary's passing, I remained present for Mary and her family and of course respected their wishes of no prayers. I loved Mary and her family as Jesus loved them.

After Mary passed, Mary's husband called for me. He wanted to visit with me about my faith. We had a meaningful conversation in which he shared the pains he has had experienced throughout his life with God. He thanked me for my service to Mary and her family that evening.

God is love. God doesn't choose certain people to love. God loves all of us. Unconditionally.

Saint Catherine of Siena was also called to intervene in the social and political tensions of her time. Her advice to the people and clergy was that renewal could come through love for God. She wrote many letters hoping to reach those in authority begging for peace. Her example remains relevant for us today in our time of social and political tension. We need to focus on how Jesus loves and bring that to the world.

St. Catherine of Siena, pray for us.

April 30, 2016

by Tom Purcell

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Saturday of the Fifth Week of Easter

Lectionary: 290

Acts 16:1-10

Psalm 100:1b-2, 3, 5

John 15:18-21

Daily Easter Prayer

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Why does the world hate Jesus? Why does it hate us if we belong to Jesus?

Hate, like love, is a very strong emotion, one that can be all-consuming. Hate can be viewed as the opposite of love, the antithesis of concern. Elie Wiesel, though, posits that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. Hate, like love, is a hot and active emotion, but indifference is cold, a total insensitivity.

Hate can turn into love, and love into hate. Consider St. Paul – his conversion experience is a clear hate into love event. Consider how difficult it is for an employee, who loves working for a company, to be summarily terminated for budget reasons and yet retain any positive feelings toward the former employer. And consider failed relationships that started off with so much promise and end in break-ups or divorce. Hate of another also could be recognition of what is absent in oneself, or a realization that the other person has characteristics or habits or shortcomings that we subconsciously know we have, and so we hate not the person but the attribute we have in common.

If Wiesel is right, though, indifference (an absence of love) might be worse than hate, because if someone doesn't care, and remains uncaring, and so is unaware of the needs, the humanity, of the other, then there is no connection at all. It seems it would be harder to generate love from indifference than from negative feelings.

So did the world hate Jesus, or was it indifferent to Him? Based on the historical accounts, hate is probably right conclusion. Jesus challenged the status quo – He turned events on their head by championing the least in a culture that was probably as top-heavy as many that exist in our world today. Jesus reminded people that their humanity and all they hold, including life itself, is a temporary loan and gift from God. He called for justice for the oppressed and thus threatened those of power and property and privilege.

The world hated Jesus because He was sensitive in the face of its insensitivity. The world hated Jesus because He loved those to whom the world was indifferent. The world hated Jesus because He was a threat to the common order of things. The world hated Jesus because He reminded it that all life is precious, and that ultimately people of privilege and people of the least means are loved by God with equal passion.

What of us today, who find ourselves in a different point in human history, with many technological and other advances from 2,000 years ago, but in a world very much like the one in which Jesus lived – one of exploitation, greed, self-centeredness, insensitivity? Are we part of the hated, the haters, or the indifferent? Do we feel pulled to preserve our privilege, our status, our good life, even if doing so harms others? Are we uneasy or comfortable that we have so much and others have so little? Do we feel entitled to our lifestyles or blessed by our good fortune? Do our possessions own us, or do we use them to help others? Do we see ourselves, our common humanity, in the eyes of the other, or do we pass by, insensitive to their cry for help? When we look to a future that promises to be even more challenging as climate changes and water shortages portend major disruptions to the very basics of life for hundreds of millions of our sisters and brothers, are we taking steps to share or to hoard our own precious resources? Do we love, or hate, or are we indifferent?

And so my prayer today is for the grace to challenge my own attitudes, to reduce my insensitivities, to decrease my hatefulness, and to increase my loving approach to all my sisters and brothers that I encounter.

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