

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Apr 30th 2016

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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