

REJECT THE VIOLENCE

A couple of weeks ago we witnessed the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump. Members of both political parties, as well as the huge majority of United States citizens were aghast at this terrible happening. President Biden and many others, including Donald Trump himself, said something like “This is not us. This is not our America.” Unfortunately, I thought, it has been actually what we have become – a nation of violence. That many of these people who take to violent means are also Christians is a betrayal of belief in Christ.

Do you find any evidence of violence in yourself? No, you not have killed or shot anyone but violence is a more consuming reality. I still find bursts of violence in myself though I have gotten better in recognizing them and letting them go. James Lawson, a Black Methodist Theologian and Civil Rights leader, died on June 8th of this year. One of his sayings was this: “Nonviolence is the science of how you create your own life in the image of God.” One way to identify violence in ourselves is to be aware of the different levels on which we indulge in violence.

The first level of violence is in my mind, in my thoughts. I think violently when I think in a dualistic way, rather than the unified way that Christ taught. This means I always see reality in my mind in a divided way – it is always us and them, we are number one and others are lower, we are superior or better or higher. So I think of women, or Blacks, or refugees, or gays as not as being as important as I am. In fact I imagine them as inferior whether I do this consciously or not. It is how I think. It may be how I have been carefully taught to think. I have to think of myself as superior to others which probably means I am not really very secure in my own self. I haven’t come to really accept that God loves all of us indiscriminately. I don’t have to prove my worth; I don’t have to earn it. We are all God’s creatures and ought to accept and see and think of all other human beings (and other creatures as well). Jesus said we can see him present “in the least of our brothers and sisters.” All this begins in our mind.

If how I think shows my violence, how I talk brings it into the open. Words are important. How I describe people can show respect or violence. Isn’t this a problem in our society when people fail to be civil and respectful in even chance encounters? We hear a lot of belittling other people, calling them names, even to

Monastic Scribe LXXVI: July 26, 2024

the point of destroying their good name and character. Politicians, as well as ordinary citizens, just don't disagree with some people, which is their right. It is one thing to describe how we disagree and another thing to attack the person. This is done not only in words but in cartoons and other clever ways of attack we find on social media. Language can be violent. It does matter how we use words. They are potent means of either constructive or destructive communication. This has become a huge problem in our society. Violent words can be oral or written. We often speak violently in spreading gossip and slander. Read the Sermon on the Mount to see how Jesus dealt with this.

The third way we indulge in violence is through our actions. Whether in nuclear warfare or school bullying, there seems to be something enticing about violence as a form of expressing strength and real masculinity. But the violence in our thoughts and in our words has already set us up for violence in action. All of us can start to change this by silently acknowledging how violent we already are and avoiding simply blaming someone else for the violence in our society. Violence has been part of the manner of life from the beginning of this country whether in the manner in which we subjugated slaves, decimated indigenous people, kept women at an inferior level of life. Remember Pogo in the comic strip who proclaimed, "We have met the enemy and it is us!"

Violence is abetted in our society by another growing characteristic, and that is our individualism. Our preoccupation with our individual rights, with MY rights, MY property, MY wealth, induces violent ways to protect myself. This is especially evident in our rights to bear lethal arms. Why do ordinary citizens need A-15 rifles? Why do my rights to bear arms prevail over care for our children who have been gunned down in many school instances? Traditional moral systems recognize that the Common Good sometimes takes precedence over individual rights.

If you are looking to learn how others are concerned about peace and lessening violence, I suggest you get in touch with "PAX Christi USA" in Washington to find support in your desire to become a less-violent people. This group has recently been awarded the inaugural Dorothy Day peacemaker award. There are many other people working to change our ethos, rather than calling us back to make America great again. It is getting back to the teachings of Christ for Christians and the Jewish and Muslim and native American traditions for others. I'll be interested

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in how you feel. You can peacefully send me a non-violent message at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.