

Perilous Times Some Observations

“You are not merely my opponent with whom I have some disagreement. You are a devil and you must be vanquished.”

This would be my characterization of the polarization of a sizable group of the citizenry of our country who are dominating the news cycle. I have never seen the tone of discourse so toxic among fellow citizens. To even refer to it as “discourse” is silly: The extremes have come to dominate civic life and it is bleeding into the life of the Church.

My observation is that the overlay of ideology combined with the demonizing of opponents prevents any validation of the other’s concerns. For example, there are certain “conservative” intellectuals on YouTube whom I enjoy listening to for their incisive commentaries. But, when it comes to the ongoing protest movements in the big cities of the country, they only seem to be able to focus on the acts of vandalism and hooliganism which have tainted the protests for justice. It seems to me that their own ideology and dread fear of their opponent’s ideology renders them incapable of affirming the real problem of the racism and the unjust killing of several black men by police which was the catalyst for the protests. Or, if they acknowledge these issues at all they are so faint as to seem like no acknowledgement at all.

On the other side, the smear on all police because of the actions of “bad cops” is clearly unfair, (As a priest living through the clergy-child-sex-abuse crisis, I know what a smear feels like.) Herein a big part of the problem is the rhetoric: The terms “systemic racism” and “defund the police” are ambiguous at best. Does the word “systemic” mean that all the police are co-conspirators, actively working against the black community? Does the call to “defund the police” carry the same connotation? Of course, there are those who have offered more nuanced answers to these questions, but their voices seemed to be drowned out by the fury of the protests. Truly, there is cause to be furious, but addressing an injustice with another injustice is just more injustice, (But, one must admit that there is a deep level of frustration with the

persistence of racism in the country which fuels this problem.)

If the foregoing was unclear, **what I am trying to express is that we seem to have is a totally unnecessary opposition between “BLM” and “The Thin Blue Line.”** Ideology and fury have rendered dialogue and understanding all but impossible. And now . . . Now bullets are killing people in the streets.

Choose a side! If you find yourself in-between, then you are nowhere! . . . So seems to be the imperative in the current climate. Who but the Lord Jesus Christ can suggest, in an absolute way, *“You are either with us or against us!”* (Matthew 12:30) Yet, this seems to be the requirement in this highly polarized environment.

The same sort of toxic, mutual suspicion threatens the life of the church. Self-appointed warriors of different stripes apply litmus tests to determine who is righteous and who is a heretic. Even orthodoxy can be distorted by human pride and, as we know from the Gospel, even the Devil can quote the Bible.



In the Second Reading of this past Sunday, (Romans 12:1-2), St. Paul exhorts, *“Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God’s will, what is good, pleasing and perfect.”* The age in which we are now living is terribly troubled. The devil is playing a game of ‘divide and conquer,’ and we should not let ourselves get sucked into this scheme. Values which flow from the Spirit and the Word should be the ones governing us, and not those of the prevailing tribalism. We ought to be able to affirm the truth of things wherever it is found.