August 11, 2019: Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

While using my iPad, a rather disturbing headline came onto my screen from my news feed. It read, “An unprece-dented 24 hours: Two mass shootings leave at least 29 dead. There have been 251 mass shootings in the US in the last 216 days.” As I read that line and processed just what it meant, it brought many questions to mind. And I have little doubt that the questions that arose in my mind were not very different from those in yours. As I read the news about these last two incidents, it was followed by the normal barrage of trying to figure out why it happened and what we can do about it. And, generally, I heard the same cases being made as in the other, past horrible events.

As I sat and prayed about ‘the why’, what came to mind was not what I anticipated. I thought of the story of Cain and Abel. In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil, while Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering He did not. Cain was very angry and felt dejected. So, the LORD said to Cain: Why are you angry and why do you feel dejected? If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is for you, yet you can be his master. Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out in the field.” When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

The reality is that what we are dealing with in this day and age is as old as human history itself. Cain blamed Abel for all his problems. If Abel was not there, then his problems would be gone. The reality is that, as human beings, we believe our problems always reside with the other. The whole history of our own nation shows this to be true. For some 200 years many believed it was perfectly reasonable to own slaves, simply based on their skin color. And even after slavery was outlawed, you had the Jim Crow era when lynchings occurred to keep those people in their place. Almost from the establishment of the first English colonies, anti-Catholicism was a norm. When the country established its independence, many states purposely wrote their oaths of office in such a way that Catholics could not take the oath and remain faithful to the Church. You had an entire party created for the sole purpose of keeping Catholics out of the country because ‘they would destroy it’. And there were many violent actions against Catholics, such as in 1834 when an Ursuline convent in Somerville was burnt to the ground.

What is true of our own nation is quite frankly true of every nation. It comes down to the simple truth that we need to start treating the other with the respect and dignity they deserve. We so easily see our differences and see them as a problem. We lose sight of our common humanity. Each person is different and that is a good thing. We are all created by God with the same sacredness and dignity, and we need to recognize that in each person. There are many issues we can disagree on, and we so easily put labels on the other that allow us to be separate from them. How often do we hear pro-life and pro-choice demonize each other? How often does the issue of immigration bring more heat than light? How often do we look at what the other says—no matter how offensive—and find that as a reason to simply dismiss them? But the reality is that we are called to a different standard.

It is not a question of politics. It is not a question of simple decency. It is not a question of civility. It is not a question about being politically correct. It is about being a Christian! As we read in Romans, “Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ Rather, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.’”

We must, of course, always stand for the truth, but we must do so in love. In our disagreements it cannot be about denigrating the humanity of the other. Each person is loved by God equally, and we must have that same level of unconditional love. It is not an option for the Christian. If we want to see a change in the world, then we must change through the grace of God. We must allow God’s unconditional love to shine through us. It does not mean we do not speak the truth. It does not mean we do not challenge people when their choices are not in line with
the will of God. But it *does* mean that we always do so in charity. We do so with no judgement about the person: for judgement of another belongs to God alone. No matter the choices they make or the opinions they hold, each and every person is a unique creation, created in love and sustained in love by our God. May we become the force of change that allows that love to be seen and realized.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian