

October 25, 2020 The Perils of Hate Homily: In his fine book, “The Hitler of History”, historian John Lukacs recounts in startling detail Joseph Goebbels first encounter with the leader of the Nationalist Socialist party in Germany, Adolf Hitler sometime in 1926. Their initial conversation left a lasting impression on the young Goebbels who, after Hitler’s election win in 1933, served as his Minister of Propaganda. Hitler kept telling him that he, Hitler, had learned to hate. It was, he said, the fundamental source of his strength. In an impassioned speech the future Chancellor of the Third Reich gave in 1921, Hitler thundered, “There is only defiance and hate... to hate and be hard... a lesson devoid of love.”

In today’s gospel reading (Mt. 22: 34-40) the adversaries of Jesus, the Pharisees, gather together in an attempt to conspire against him. There is an echo of the 2nd Psalm: “The rulers gathered against the Lord and his anointed”. It is clear that they despise Jesus, the Lord’s anointed. Blind hatred is the force that animates them to act with such treachery in mind.

They tested him. In Matthew’s gospel the term is used no fewer than six times altogether from one end of the gospel to the other. The first time the term appears is in the account of Jesus’ temptation in the desert, which can be found in the fourth chapter. One detects the whiff of Satan in the controversy outlined by the Evangelist. In view of Our Lord’s command to love God and neighbor, the Pharisees plot to deceive and seek to destroy Jesus. Hatred is poisonous. It withers the heart and, if left unchecked, usually leads to violence. The condemnation and crucifixion of Christ lends credence to what must be obvious to the reflective listener.

Jesus insists that the love we practice toward each other is the measure of our love for God. In his first epistle, Saint John writes: “If anyone says, ‘I love God’ but hates his brother, he is a liar. For whoever does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (I Jn. 4:20)

Recall, if you will, the parable of the Good Samaritan in St. Luke’s gospel. It was our Lord’s response to the question, “And who is my neighbor?” Samaritans and Jews detested each other.

Only recently the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, was asked a rather pointed question by a member of the press corps: “Madam Speaker, do you hate President Trump?” Mrs. Pelosi was taken aback. She replied, “As a Christian I must never hate anyone. I don’t hate President Trump. Indeed, I pray for him daily.”

Some questions to consider:

First, can we think of anyone we know who puts into practice Our Lord’s teaching on loving God and neighbor? I, for one, am reminded of Father Vaughan, who, in the twenty years we were together, never said a bad word about anyone. I have not been as charitable as the recently deceased Pastor of Sacred Heart Church. In the presence of the Lord, I stand guilty of betraying Our Lord’s teaching on the unconditional love of others;

Second, are our intentions sometimes questionable? Do we look for opportunities to entrap, embarrass and discredit others? Do we take a secret delight in the downfall of our enemies? Consider the representatives of the corporate media. Does it not seem that their sole objective is to destroy the

reputations of the most powerful and influential members of society rather than to seek the facts or truth of a particular news story?

At the end of his Spiritual Exercises, Saint Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, makes two important points about Christian love. First, love is proved by deeds rather than by words; and second, lovers tend to demonstrate their love by giving each other gifts. For Ignatius the supreme gift is Christ himself, He is a blessing from heaven. But what gifts, Ignatius asks, have we given in return? By loving our neighbor we fulfill our Christian duty by obeying the Lord's commandment.

In our post Christian culture, Christians are often singled out for hatred by the enemies of the faith. We need not be surprised. After all did not Christ himself say that "if the world hates you, realize that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you." (Jn. 15: 18-19) But we must rise above the world's hatred by imitating our Lord, who loved us unconditionally to the end of his life.

Amen.