

August 29, 2015 John Baptist's Suffering

First Reading 1 Thessalonians 4: 9-11

Paul commends the love that Thessalonians have for one another, and all the brothers in Macedonia. He urges them to increase that love, as well as to "live a tranquil life, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your own hands."

Gospel Mark 6: 17-29

Account of the Beheading of John the Baptist

I was struck with Paul's instructions in the Epistle to mind their own business. (I started the meditation a little down, because of reminders of others' lack of belief in the Catholic faith, although they had been raised in it. I keep trying to puzzle out how they can reject what seems to me to be so obvious in terms of history, and so appealing to the intellect. And even more so in terms of grace and consolation. They seem like people who prefer Twinkies and Crackerjack to good nourishing food.)

But, maybe I should mind my own business, as Paul admonishes. Why would he include this warning in a brief list of warnings to these brand new Christians? Possibly both questions arrive at the same place. The Church has for some time concerned itself chiefly with its own list of don'ts, chiefly having to do with sex and reproduction. This is instead of preaching and teaching about God's love and its twin, love for others. This is an extreme example of minding the business of others, even those who don't claim the Catholic faith. Church officials are then seen as condemning others, many of them Catholics or those who might be Catholics. I'm firmly convinced, based on reading the New Testament, that it is our genuine love for God and others that matters, and that the Commandments, God's and the Church's, matter, only to the degree that they reflect our love for God.

So, when a sinner (and, aren't we all?) considers how to respond to grace, an icy reception or complete rejection from the Church will send that person off in a different direction. The sinner is deprived of a religious experience, and, even worse, God may be deprived of the love that person might have given Him. (Remember Jesus' parable of the Good Shepherd and the lost sheep?)

What part can we members of the Church, the Body of Christ, when the official church seems to work against God's plan – Paul's admonition for mutual love? I think it's clear from other Jesus-statements, we should stop judging others' actions, i.e., mind our own business, as Paul advises. Then as members of the Church, we should, I think, do whatever we can to get the Church to follow Christ's command to love one another, without having the other person satisfy some criteria of what kind of life they have lead. Jesus' priorities are abundantly clear: Love God, and show that love by loving your neighbors. If that happens, maybe the fallen-away Catholics will come to appreciate God's love, and make their own lives more caring for others.

(I'm aware that John the Baptist got into prison and was killed, chiefly because he criticized Herod for living with his brother's wife. But, his criticism did not stop the sinful behavior; instead it led to a graver sin, his murder.)