



Homily for 9/22/2019

15th Sunday after Pentecost

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

Who Is My Enemy?

Writing in *Crisis Magazine*, Anthony Esolen, a noted scholar of literature and promotor of Catholic Christian culture, presented a piece that struck a chord in me. It is entitled, “Who is my Enemy?”*

He says, “We are trying to live the faith in a bad time. The engines of the mass phenomena are all ranged against us: schools and colleges, television, newspapers, Hollywood, and government. . . . We ourselves are tentative, or we flail about. How can we best present the faith to a people glutted with half-truths, falsehoods, bad reasoning, and the fevered emotions of political enmity? In such a time, it’s tempting to let disgruntlement get the better of us and go after the easy target: our fellow faithful Christian, whose way of confronting troubles is not ours.”

He goes on to preface his point with an example from Roman history about the essential difference between a disagreement in tactics and a disagreement on principles. He gave the example of Cato and Scipio during the Punic Wars. They had very different tactics and in fact vehemently disagreed with each other about how to win the war. But the point of agreement was that both men wanted to win the war – they both had an equal hatred for their enemy Carthage. Cato and Scipio is an example of who is *not* our enemy. They were different, but they were both Roman and had the same aim. In other words, your fellow countryman may fight the same scourge but with different means. But this does not mean your fellow countryman is your enemy.

On the other hand, he gives the example of Catiline and then Caesar: two men who actively plotted the fall of the Roman Republic. They were power-hungry traitors to Rome itself. Catiline plotted the murder of the consuls for one year and then conspired to take over the consulship during a crisis. He was defeated in battle. Caesar on the other hand, for all of his renown and name recognition, was a traitor to the Roman Republic – marching on Rome and seizing power and making himself the first Roman Emperor, dictator for life. Whatever Rome became after Caesar, it was not what it had been before. Catiline and Caesar, therefore, were not men who simply disagreed about the tactics of how Rome was to engage her enemies, they disagreed in principle about whether or not Rome should exist. They were true enemies of the Roman Republic.

With these two examples and their necessary nuance as the background, Esolen then says, “How can we tell a Catiline from a Cato, or a Caesar from a Scipio? Not by personality or by tastes, but by principles.” And this is where he joins this background to our present situation in the Church and in the political sphere.

He says, “The person in charge of the lousy music at [some local] church is probably just ignorant of what sacred music is, and what it’s for. I’ve criticized lousy music for doing real harm to the Church. But the music leader (assuming he isn’t motivated by the heresy evident in a lot of that music) is not your enemy. The person who believes that the Novus Ordo was a mistake, but that it is a valid way of celebrating Mass, is not your enemy. The person who believes that the traditional rite is good, but the Novus Ordo is better, is not your enemy. I’m assuming that each person believes what the Church teaches about the Mass: it’s the sacrifice of Christ re-enacted; it’s to be oriented toward the worship of God and not toward the good feelings of the worshipers; and it’s to be celebrated with reverence and solemnity, not slovenliness and informality.”

He then goes on to social topics. “The person who believes that innocent human life is never deliberately to be destroyed, and who agrees that this teaching is—under current conditions prevailing in the West—to be extended to include those guilty of punishment deserving death, is not your enemy. The person who demurs about the latter, because he does not find the arguments to be cogent, is not your enemy. I’m assuming that the former

* <https://www.crisismagazine.com/2019/who-is-my-enemy> (accessed 9/22/19)



person doesn't believe that the Church ever taught falsehood or wickedness, and that the latter person is willing to be persuaded and is not rejecting arguments [simply] because of who is making them."

He goes on to talk about the different ways of seeing the immigrant debate and the debates about marriage in public life concluding by saying, "So with other areas of contention. When the ends are the same, but the means are in question, never forget that arguments about means will rarely be decisive." He then goes on to say, "For example, I want to revive marriage in my country. So does my interlocutor. I believe that, in order to do so, boys and girls should sometimes be kept separate: we should reconsider single-sex schooling. My interlocutor is worried that segregation will produce boys and girls who don't get along with each other at all. I reply that they aren't getting along now, when they are mixed together indiscriminately, so we have nothing to lose. But so long as we both want a lot of healthy and happy marriages, we're not enemies."

He wraps up his article by saying, "Principles are the key. If you say that innocent human life may deliberately be destroyed, you're not Cato but Catiline. If you say that the Mass is primarily about those who attend, you're not Scipio but Caesar. If you say that the Church has taught evil, you're beyond the pale—beyond the palisade, outside of the fortifications. If you say that a nation's just laws may be flouted, or that the poor from other nations are merely to be sent packing when they ask to come to your country, you are making for trouble. Fights there will be. Cato was right to call Scipio out for his leniency, and Scipio was right to complain about the miserly censor. They were wrong to let these differences lapse into enmity. At the same time, principles are never to be compromised, and means are never to be taken as principles."

I've always very much admired Anthony Esolen and I think this is a very timely article. When the whole of Western Civilization, the champion of Catholic Christian culture, comes crashing down around us, the last thing we should be doing is engaging in friendly fire. And yet, that is what I am seeing all around us. Because we have been wounded by the hierarchy, priest, bishops and even popes, we think it is alright to be uncharitable and ugly towards them. I am seeing so many people in the traditionalist camp beginning to look like the mean-spirited and raging liberals of the 60's and 70's. There is vitriol and hatred coming all around. Twitter wars very rarely solve anything. Facebook screeds and ad hominem attacks are unvirtuous and unbecoming of Christians. The last thing we need to do when the city is burning is to start hating our own. Now, to be fair, this age in the Church is an age of suspicion. The term schismatic gets thrown around a lot without a critical eye to the truth. But in the same way, we often misuse the term modernist or heretic and it becomes a catch-all for anything that is simply "not my preference." The bitter knife cuts both ways.

I say this as a pastor, a shepherd of souls. The ship of the Church is taking on water but the passengers aren't working together. I have spent my priesthood defending orthodoxy from the hands of those who would cast doctrine and dogma to the wind. However, lately, I have seen that there are other elements at the rear that are equally disruptive. In my directives to the parish staff I have often said, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good!" Just because someone isn't yet Mother Theresa doesn't mean she is a Jezebel! There are too many people who are ready to cast the first stone when there is the perception of anything that isn't in a manual from 1570 as if there hasn't been any development of doctrine since then or that there can't be any after 1962. I have heard too many well-meaning people, admittedly wounded by the past 50 years, disparage the work of the Holy Spirit in people like Pope St. John Paul II simply because he was a flawed human being who made mistakes. Saints are not those who are perfect in action, but rather those who were perfectly in love with the Lord. We have to be careful of the hardness of hearts. Pope St. John Paul II is not the enemy! *Humane Vitae* is not the enemy and Natural Family Planning is not the enemy! As long as we agree that human life is precious and should be cherished and protected at every stage from conception to natural death, we are in principle, one. Carping at public figures and

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tearing down legitimate prudential judgements is only dividing us. “Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees! For you build the tombs of the prophets, but your fathers killed them!”

I have been on the frontlines of the battle for orthodoxy for all the 14 years of my priesthood. Yes, there have been some bad decisions made by our leaders. Absolutely we have made mistakes in the way the Second Vatican Council was implemented or carried out. But that doesn’t mean we have a right, if we call ourselves Catholic, to simply throw out the whole Council, any more than those who threw out the nineteen hundred years of tradition that preceded the Council. Are there problematic statements that have to be understood correctly? Of course! But that doesn’t mean that the Fathers of the Council were all evil or that the Holy Spirit wasn’t at work. There are many who act as if there is no possibility of organic development of the liturgy. That is an ignorant position held out of defiance because they saw a “clown Mass” one time. The “clown Mass” is an abomination, but so is the idolizing of a set of rubrics as if they were set down by angels. Rubrics can change. I’ll be the first one to say they shouldn’t change much or too fast. But they develop just like doctrine. Does the *Novus Ordo Missae* have deficiencies, flaws and problems? I’ll be the first to argue in the affirmative. But that does not mean that it is invalid. I’ll put it this way - if the *Novus Ordo* is invalid, it would mean that I’m not ordained. Neither was Fr. Blatchford, neither was Fr. Santiago. Be careful of cutting oneself off from the root because one thinks his flower is so beautiful! That flower will quickly wither and fade if it’s not connected to the vine even if the vine is imperfect!

The devil is trying to sift us like wheat. He is a prowling lion looking for someone to devour. We must resist him. Resist him, solid in your faith! The last thing we should be doing in an age that hates Christianity is for Christians to be hating one another. “Brethren, if we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit. Let us not be made desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another. Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any fault, you, who are spiritual, instruct him in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted!” “Bear one another’s burdens, and so you shall fulfill the law of Christ.” If we want the Latin Mass and Orthodoxy and Truth, Beauty and Goodness to continue to thrive in Chattanooga and elsewhere, we must be humble and meek and docile and kind and charitable and welcoming and even evangelical. We must not be puffed up with prideful righteousness or shriveled with isolationist fear. Put out into the deep and be joyful. We must not look down our noses at those who see things differently. We must be convincing by our actions as well as our words, by our embrace of a brother rather than our condescension. We must desire that all - yes, even “that one” - be saved. We are living the faith in a bad time. Am I my brother’s keeper? Yes, Cain, you are, so stop killing your brother with your words and in your heart. He is not your enemy. Pray for the conversion of sinners, yourself first. Pray with God not for the death of the heretic, the schismatic or the modernist, but rather that he be converted and live! Vitriol, enmity, adversity and hatred are the tactics of the devil. Our tactics are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. “May Thy Sacraments, O Lord, safeguard us, and ever defend us against the assaults of the devil. . . both exterior and interior.”

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