

“What were you arguing about on the way?” In the Book of Wisdom, a wise elder describes the irreligious. They are wicked and deny life after death. They pursue life for pleasure alone. “Let us have our fill of costly wine and perfumes ... Let no meadow be free from our wantonness ... Let us oppress the righteous poor; let us neither spare the widow nor revere the aged for hair grown white with time” (Wis 2:6-10). The wicked want to take from life and give nothing back.

More than that, the wicked seek to destroy all that is good. “Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is annoying to us; he opposes our actions” (Wis 2:12). Written some 50 years before the birth of Jesus, we see the snare of the devil prepared to snare the coming Messiah and plot to destroy him. “He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the righteous and boasts that God is his Father” (2:16).

Such evil thoughts are folly. The wise elder tries to help those who have strayed in their faith to see right from wrong and to understand the foolishness of a self-centered life that seeks riches at the expense of the poor. “For God formed us to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made us. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are allied with him experience it” (2:24). To side with the devil is to invite eternal damnation.

“What were you arguing about on the way?” (Mk 9:33). Jesus tells his disciples: “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death he will rise” (Mk 9:31). Yes, Jesus is aware of the irreligious who will plot to kill him but there is much more to the story. The Passion of Jesus is part of the Divine plan for our Salvation. “We held him in no esteem. Yet it was our pain that he bore, our sufferings he endured. We thought of him as stricken, struck down by God and afflicted ... he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity. He bore the punishment that makes us whole, by his wounds we were healed” (Isa 53:3-5).

Jesus came that we might have eternal life. By his sacrifice we are made whole. The disciples do not understand this. Instead, they argue over who is the greatest. The greatest is not the one who sits at the head of the table while others serve him. The greatest is the one who lives a life of sacrifice, one who serves especially the poor and lowly. “Children were the symbol Jesus used for the ... poor in spirit, the lowly in the Christian community” (Note to Mk 9:33-37).

In the Letter from the Apostle James, we have a sharp contrast between the greatest and the wickedest:

- A self-centered life oppresses the poor and lowly. It brings chaos and disorder. The contrasting life of sacrifice is not easy, but it bears good fruit. One knows peace and practices mercy.
- A self-centered life lifts one group up at the expense of another. We think of Hitler oppressing the Jews to lift the German nation out of the despair of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. We fear the oppression of women as the Taliban consolidate power in Afghanistan. “Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? ... You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war” (Jas 4:1-2).
- “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts... Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep ... Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you” (Jas 4:8-10).

“What were you arguing about on the way?” We live in chaotic times. It’s as if people prefer to argue rather than seek peace and reconciliation. The nation has been arguing about abortion for more than 50 years. One of the chief architects in the struggle to legalize abortion was Dr. Bernard Nathanson. In his younger days one might describe him as a wicked and irreligious man. After running a financially profitable abortion clinic and having crisscrossed the nation to help legalize abortion state after state, he hit a brick wall. He quit. As his conscience kicked in amidst the silence and stillness of inactivity, he thought costly wines could soothe his troubled soul. They did not. God called him to draw near and cleanse his hands.

One day, Dr. Nathanson encountered peaceful protesters outside of an abortion clinic. He was struck by their genuine care and concern for the women who found themselves in the difficult position of seeking an abortion. “But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity” (Jas 3:17). Their kindness was a sharp contrast to the self-centered entrepreneurs he knew from inside the abortion industry. The kindness and gentleness of those who advocated for life welcomed the doctor as he sought healing. After a long conversion process, this once wicked man turned his life over to God and found forgiveness, peace, and a new purpose in life to protect the unborn. All things are possible with the help of God.

September 22<sup>nd</sup> marks the beginning of 40 days of prayer to protect life. The prayer continues everyday until the end of October. 40 Days for Life is an international campaign to end abortion locally through prayer and fasting, community outreach, and a peaceful all-day vigil in front of abortion businesses. Arguing and shouting are not effective, but peaceful prayer has proven to be a life-giving path to help all who have been harmed by abortion. Doctors and clinic workers seek a new path in life. Those who carry the pain of an abortion find peace. Children in the womb have a chance at a full life. Let us not forget, Jesus’ teaching: “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me” (Mk 9:37).