March 24, 2019
Third Sunday of Lent – Year C Readings

EX 3:1-8A, 13-1
PS 103: 1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11.
1 COR 10:1-6, 10-12
LK 13:1-9

By Thad Crouch

We hear about deaths from disasters, accidents, domestic violence, assisted suicide, the death penalty, abortion, and mass shootings—both civilian and military.

God wants to end affliction and suffering caused by our mistreatment of one another.

Jesus says God is not looking to ambush us for our sins, but rather patiently cultivating us through our fruitless years. God watches and waits for us to open parts of our hearts where we avoid Him. God constantly offers grace we can take for our conversion away from sin toward a deeper, more encompassing love.

St. Paul’s warning hints that just as the Hebrews in the desert angered God while partaking of spiritual food, we too—even though we might partake of the Blessed Sacrament — must be careful not to fall. This is a Lenten call to examine conscience, repent, and seek grace in the sacrament of reconciliation.

Perhaps a culture of examined conscience could be a vital step toward creating a Culture of Life.

As the Church, we can help each other notice areas where avoiding God not only impedes the Culture of Life, but also promotes the culture of death.

Forty years ago, a medical ethicist in La Crosse, Wisconsin, started a program requesting all hospital patients fill out advance directives, a type of Conscience Directive about end-of-life care. Not everyone’s directives followed Church teaching, but many did when they otherwise might not have given it thought. They changed the culture such that by 2009, 96% of adults who die in La Crosse have completed an advance directive. They reduced end-of life healthcare costs because many people are not afraid of natural death.

How did they accomplish this? They did this by having the conversations that were not being had.

In states with the death penalty, some Christians and those of good will are signing Conscience Directives (CDs) so that, if they are murdered, prosecutors know they don’t want the death penalty. CDs might also become both a great public witness and also a method of education about nonviolent responses to crisis pregnancies.
CDs could help Catholics already in, or considering, the military. While there are rigorous military regulations to navigate red-tape and possibly be granted Conscientious Objector status, few troops succeed without guidance. Imagine a culture of conscience campaign resulting in 96% of all Catholics of military age having well-formed consciences, completing CDs on war, and giving them to their pastors, school counselors, recruiters, Congress members, and commanding officers!

This requires conversations about places we’ve been avoiding God.

This requires teaching proven effective methods of nonviolence, peacebuilding, and peacemaking. The Catechism states that “All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war” (2308). Humanity now has many, many, many historical examples of effective nonviolence, peacebuilding, and peacemaking, yet many people are still killed by military mass shootings.

In the words of one of our newest saints, Oscar Romero, Bishop & Martyr, martyred 39 years ago this very day, “Nothing is so important as human life, as the human person... Jesus says that whatever is done to them he takes as done to Him. That bloodshed, those deaths are beyond all politics: They touch the very heart of God.”

Even in the midst of the shadow of the culture of death, God cultivates, Jesus knocks, and the Spirit longs to touch the very heart of each of us.

Let’s stop avoiding the Trinity. Examine conscience. Repent.

Start having the conversations required to live faithfully and reduce humanity’s sinful inhumanity to humanity. Let’s build a culture of examined conscience and life.

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Notes:
“Why This Wisconsin City Is The Best Place To Die,” Heard on All Things Considered, National Public Radio, by Joseph Shapiro. November 16, 2009

How To Die In America: Welcome To La Crosse, Wisconsin, www.forbes.com, by Craig Hatkoff, Rabbi Irwin Kula, and Zach Levine

Homily, Archbishop Oscar Romero, March 16, 1980