

BULLETIN -- MARCH 19

Penance opportunities. You will find confessions available with multiple confessors at the following locations this week and next:

Tues., March 21, 2 p.m. West Catholic H.S. cafeteria
Thurs., March 23, 8:50-11:45 a.m. St. Andrew's Cathedral
12:30-2:50 p.m. (with Catholic Central H.S.)
Sun., March 26, 11 a.m. SS. Peter & Paul (here! ☺)
Thurs., March 30, 6 p.m. Holy Family, Caledonia

Loyalty and betrayal. Don't just think of the hapless underling who had ratted on Al Capone and had his skull caved in at a conference table by the mobster himself. Loyalty has been prized since time immemorial as a life-preserving human trait, much as the herd instinct in animals serves their own self-preservation. "Tribalism" might sound like a primitive concept in our age of instant global communication and internationally transient families and individuals. But tribalism is apparent in the tendency, for instance, of immigrants from a certain village or region to settle along one particular street or in one particular neighborhood. Or in the actions of threatened, ignorant people who feel a need to vent their anger on anyone who does not belong to their ever-shrinking group of mental midgets.

What many of our ancestors did over a century ago in forming Lithuanian or Polish or Italian "ghettos" around their parish churches, we find replaying among Chaldeans in suburban Detroit or Central Americans in Burton Heights. However, we can easily detect its offspring in political parties, in business and industry, in alumni and team sentiment, and in religious communities and organizations. In large families in years past, there were often one or two children who, as they grew up, identified less and less with their family of origin and more and more with their newfound "family" in a gang, a vocation, or with whomever they could "spread their wings." Sometimes they maintained some degree of connection with the folks back home, sometimes not. Indifference to family could often be traced to what these wanderers described as a suffocating home life. As was said during the First World War, "It's hard to get 'em back on the farm once they've seen Par-EE."

Dr. Jonathan Haidt offers us this third pair of opposites -- loyalty and betrayal -- as one of five foundational or counter-foundational principles for all of morality. Loyalty was what ensured the safety and security of the group, be it a family, a clan, a village, or a city. Cities were groupings of groups, large enough and diverse enough that the occupants of cities were eager to build walls to keep others out, or at least to control their entry and exit. The individual families and clans could have their own loyalties; but for the safety and security of the larger community, physical barriers were a necessity in a hostile environment, just as national borders and various means of controlling movements of peoples may be important yet today.

Family and clan loyalty might not be as tight today as it has been in centuries past, due to the tremendous transience of people around the world. The travels of a Marco Polo or of the missionaries of all ages were truly remarkable; but they were the exception, not the norm. The majority of peoples stayed close to their places of origin,

many never traveling farther than 25 miles from home throughout their entire lives. (No wonder most accidents took place there!) We have to look rather to the expansion of Islamic and Arab populations and culture across North Africa in the 7th through the 10th centuries, and to the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, as significant moments in human history which left both genetic and architectural footprints on the lands they subjugated. Then the magnetism of the United States from the mid-19th century to today remains both remarkable and exceptional. But today, it is not unusual to encounter people on almost any continent who have the physical traits of forbears from two or more other continents.

Genealogy is one way that people have discovered to both confirm their loyalty to their clan and to expand their horizons, as they often find that their own origin is much more diverse than they had imagined. We may have spoken with friends or co-workers who have taken a DNA test only to find that they had ancestors who were of Jewish, African, or Native American origin, while they believed their family to be have been of purely European Christian descent. This often gives them an impetus to find out more about these origins, and provides them a new perspective on and an appreciation of their “new” global cousins.

In Isaiah 58, we find the Old Testament version of what we often call the corporal works of mercy enumerated by Jesus in Matthew 25. When God speaks through the prophet to his people, he says that the kind of fasting he wishes consists of “releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke, setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them, *and not turning your back on your own*” (58:6-7, emphasis added). Curiously, Jesus leaves that last divine urging out in his list of merciful deeds. We might at first think it curious that he promises a place in his Kingdom to those who have left everything and followed him: “Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more” (Matthew 19:29). Isn’t this an invitation to disloyalty, to abandonment of one’s family responsibilities?

It should be clear that, in calling God’s people to become *the new Israel*, Jesus is calling us to eliminate the boundaries that tribalism finds so important for self-preservation. This is quite the opposite of betrayal. It is in fact an expansion of loyalty! As Christians, we can no longer afford to be hemmed in by the same things that limit the worldview of our merely natural human state. Don’t confuse this with political calls for open borders or an end to concepts of citizenship or some kind of new world order. To paraphrase what Our Lord said to Pilate in John 18:36, “*My new world order is not of this world,*” just as he has earlier told his disciples, “*My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you*” (John 14:27; emphasis added). It is Christ who tells us to pray for our enemies, not only our countrymen (Matthew 5:43-44). Tax collectors and pagans love those who love them, and greet their brothers only. As disciples of Christ, we are to expand our loyalties beyond measure, in imitation of God himself.

Our February CSA rebate has come back to us in the form of a check for **\$508.00**, bringing us to a total of **\$20,554** over and above our target which you have made available for us in carrying out our mission as a parish. Thank you for your continuing generosity, and congratulations! God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: Afraid of the sacrament of penance? Afraid to go to confession? Something you did, long ago or recently, eating away at you and you don't know how to say it? On the unfathomable mercy of God, ponder these lines as if Christ himself were saying them to you:

Nothing you confess
Could make me love you less.