

BULLETIN -- MARCH 5

We've heard of the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, the ten commandments, the eight beatitudes, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven corporal and the seven spiritual works of mercy, the seven capital sins, the four cardinal virtues, and the four theological virtues. You can (and *should*, from time to time) find all of these listed and described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. They are vitally important Scripturally-based guides to the virtues to be acquired and vices to be avoided in the living of the Christian life. Much of the unhappiness in our rapidly declining society today is due not just to disobedience or violation of the positive behaviors these virtues make possible, but to absolute ignorance that they even exist or are something to strive for. If the Savior is even referenced, it is often "Jesus loves me just as I am" instead of quoting Jesus' actual words, "*Turn away from sin* and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). Constant conversion? Forget it. That's too hard, and doesn't get me what I want.

Now and then, we are assisted by the social sciences, in ways that we might not expect, to investigate even further the validity of the Church's moral teachings in the light of actual scientific findings. Such are the five foundations of morality enumerated by social psychologist Jonathan Haidt (pronounced as in *height*). Dr. Haidt was born in 1963, and specializes in the psychology of morality. We have alluded to his work in last week's bulletin, and described it a bit in a recent Sunday homily.

Dr. Haidt's findings are that morality is constructed on five basic foundations, to which all of the other virtues and commandments that we can think of can be attached. In short, these five foundations (and their opposites) are: 1) care / harm, 2) fairness / injustice, 3) loyalty / betrayal, 4) authority / anarchy, and 5) purity / degradation. Obviously, each of these needs to be examined and fleshed out in more detail. This we hope to do in installments each Sunday of Lent. And so we begin today, considering the moral foundation of *care* and its opposite, *harm*.

We are all familiar with Christ's words, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34). Care and concern are major components of love. We toss the word "love" around carelessly, equating it with attraction, passion, heartthrobs. On their wedding day, when bride and groom say to one another, "I will love you and honor you all the days of my life," they of course cannot know what will happen sooner or later to challenge that commitment. All too often, we hear former spouses say, "I don't love him/her anymore," or "We fell out of love." Well, if you fell out of it, it wasn't love to begin with. It's critical to recall that the second word of the standard wedding vow is "will." It is an act and promise of the *will*, not of the emotions. So if the claim is that we have stopped loving someone, it means that we don't *want* to anymore.

How can I love someone when they've hurt me so badly? "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Oh, yeah, but he was God, for cryin' out loud! "Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). See why the virtues are recommended for our practice and progress? We are in dire need of them, if we are ever to grow in the more difficult supreme law of love. But we must, if we are to reflect God, in whose image we are made.

So it should be evident that love is far more than to what the evil one wants to limit it in dangling it before our eyes and hearts. You might say that you find it difficult

to love someone; and granted, you might not *like* them. You might *never* l-i-k-e them! But care? Concern? That's where the act of the will comes in. Show me a skilled emergency medical tech who refuses to aid someone stricken with some sudden and unexpected ailment, just because the EMT happens to know and not like them. No, no, at that moment, all personal feuds and other considerations are set aside. The hours of professional training kick in and overcome any biases that might on any other occasion lead our EMT to avoid this individual. And when all is said and done, the EMT might say, "I wouldn't usually give that bum the time of day, but hey, this is my job." Our "job," our vocation as disciples of Christ, is to bring that care and concern to each and every person whom the Lord sends our way. And because we bear the name of Christ, we have a special call to love the unlovable.

In what should be a very familiar hymn, *The Summons* (in our LMGM hymnal No. 622), we are given numerous examples of care and concern in the name of Christ. "Will you go where you don't know, will you leave yourself behind, will you care for cruel and kind, will you risk the hostile stare, will you let the blinded see, will you kiss the leper clean, will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around?" These things, and not sentiment, are the "stuff" of love. They are all examples of care and concern. They are acts of the will.

It seems obvious that the opposite of care and concern is harm. Often enough, harm can be unintentional, such as when someone is "at fault" in an accident injuring others. Sometimes a certain amount of harm is intended, but is in fact exceeded in the execution (pun intended): "I meant to scare him, I didn't mean to kill him." The intention is important. The same or similar action might be performed by each of two men with a knife; but one is an assailant, the other a surgeon.

Conflict in human affairs and beliefs is always possible over the relative weight of care and harm. The 19 conspirators who attacked the U.S. on September 11, 2001, truly believed that the harm they were inflicting by killing nearly 3,000 and injuring over 6,000 unsuspecting fellow human beings was in fact an expression of care and concern for *their own people* and their own cause. (We'll look at that again when we consider the third foundation of morality, *loyalty*.) If they could have taken out more, they would have. Their actions were cheered on by people dancing in the streets in certain parts of the world, vividly illustrating the macabre horror of the "us vs. them" mentality.

There may be complete disagreement in certain cases over whether a given action is care or harm (think also of the example of abortion). Nonetheless, all human beings are capable of understanding when they are the recipients of care and when they are the recipients of harm, even if the true motive is unknown to them. It is often that knowledge of care or harm that leads to further, similar actions on the part of the recipient. We do know how to "pay it forward." But it's a choice and an act of the will (and cooperation with the grace of God) that leads someone who has been treated kindly to respond in kind. Conversely, it's a choice and an act of the will (and neglect of the grace of God) when one who has been sexually abused as a child carries that on by becoming an abuser. Unless a person is truly insane and incapable of rational thought, the reason for *care* being a foundational moral principle is universally evident. God bless you!

Thought for the week: Relativism means that the statement “Nothing is true for everybody” has to be a statement that is true for everybody. Welcome to the world of the absurd! This is why many advocates of “tolerance” do not tolerate those who are intolerant, according to the standards of the “tolerant”! Because relativism is so shallow, disagreement cannot be tolerated, and quickly becomes perceived as and labeled as “hate.”