***Swatting a Flea with a Shotgun***

Do you know people who get upset easily about just about anything that doesn’t go their way? First of all, we must look inside ourselves and be very honest about what upsets us. What we may discover is that no matter how hard we try, we are still the little boy or little girl of decades ago who felt neglected or ignored, felt inferior to others, and felt that others looked down upon us. As much as we wish we weren’t that way, we need to start off by being very honest. Suppression is when we “push down” feelings and memories and know we have done it, and repression is when matters are “pushed down” and we still have the feelings but not the conscious memories. Alfred Adler and others have noted what happens when we are constantly striving to overcome the hurt of the past, but do so in destructive ways. An unfortunate example would be the person who became a teacher in order to dominate in the same way in which he or she was dominated or the man who became a priest to have fleeting moments of recognition. If we respond to our own sense of need instead of seeking healing we should never be surprised when we discover in our own lives that we have become the very people whom we disliked, or we discover that we have spent our entire lives attempting to gain the approval of someone who died years ago!

 For those who read the Holy Scriptures casually, it is obvious that Jesus can heal us, but what happens when we have carried around with us daily, a lifetime of bitterness, anger, resentment, and feelings of insecurity? Sometimes the people who bite us the hardest are really very insecure people who have spent a lifetime trying to demonstrate to others that they are worthy of our attention and admiration. In fact, those who criticize others the most are really speaking to people whom they no longer see, but they carry around the words that were spoken perhaps even decades ago.

 Paired Associate Learning is a principle in learning theories, whereby it is easier to learn something new that is similar to something that we have already learned. Emotionally this may also be true, but not in a positive way. For example, a person may overreact to something said because it is so similar to something said maybe even decades ago. This “paired association” means that the person in the present moment receives the wrath “double dose.” Two people are receiving the angry response: one from years ago and the one in the current situation.

 Once again, let’s look deep inside. Do we have feelings of insecurity, of resentment or inferiority that we have never addressed? Have we asked Jesus to heal us? Without going into detail over the course of nearly five decades of ministry, I have been drawn into numerous situations where it had been reported that a “deliverance” was needed, and in some cases that was true. However, much more often I have discovered that what was really needed was **inner healing**, and sadly, there is no “quick fix.” I was very blessed to be a close friend and “disciple” of a pioneer in the Healing Ministry, Emily Gardiner Neal. I remember on one Healing Mission with her when she told me that in her opinion that the **Healing of Memories** was much more difficult than a physical healing or a deliverance. “Feelings” often dominate people’s lives and people can confuse “feelings” with “thinking.” Moreover, the average person wants feelings to be what they by nature usually cannot be — logical. We do not always know why we feel the way we do and there may be absolutely no logic associated with the “why.” We can medicate, we can meditate and we can cogitate, but we need to submit ourselves to Jesus, because He is ultimately the only One who can heal us of memories that stunt our growth.

 So, what upsets you the most? When someone second guesses you? When someone does not respect your authority? When someone misjudges you? When someone no longer trusts you? Think deeply. Are you angry with a person beyond what would be “normal” because they remind you of someone in your past, or they dared to say something that reminds you of some event in your past? Carl Jung coined the phrase “wounded healer” and in that concept he asserted that an “analyst” (counsellor, priest, etc) feels compelled to treat the client/patient/parishioner because the analyst is seeking to discover his or her own healing. Several decades ago, a study was conducted with graduate students of applied psychology using a testing instrument to gain more knowledge of the motivations of the students seeking advanced degrees in psychology. The results indicated that 82% who were tested admitted to having mental health issues. Often, we seek ways to be healed, but we fail to go to the only One who can heal us.

 Decades ago, I sent one of my curates to the house of a parishioner who was no longer attending Mass. The curate came back “shell shocked” and reported that the parishioner yelled and screamed and went into detail about priests and parishes of the past who had offended him. I asked the curate if he thanked the parishioner for sharing that. The curate was shocked! “Of course not,” he said to me. “The entire time I was there he was attacking me.” I explained to the young priest that it was such a blessing that the parishioner trusted my curate enough to share so freely, knowing and trusting that the priest would still love the parishioner. We cannot always be responsible for how others respond to us, and if people are angry with God those of us who represent Him should never be surprised when the anger is expressed towards us.

 So…how do you handle anger? Do you have to offer a good excuse every time you are moved to anger as a way of telling others that you deserve to be angry? Do people REALLY make us angry or do we choose to be angry? Do we look for the spiritual elements of anger and do we know how to **distinguish between anger and frustration**? Do we know how to distinguish between oppression, possession, and depression? A few things to ponder.

 In the end, with poverty, with the persecution of Christians worldwide, with a pandemic and with violence all around us — is it really necessary to kill our “fleas: with a shotgun?”