***Power Hunger - The Appetite That Is Never Satisfied***

“She/He is Power Hungry!” Simply watching any network news at any time of the day indicates that hunger for power continues to manifest itself. In political circles it is obvious that with so many people power hungry that not everyone is going to be fed. People define in their minds the power that they seek and then they proceed to push for it. So often the very people who are lusting after power will deny that this is the case, and a sophisticated form of passive aggressive behavior coupled with rationalizations emerges. There have even been several remakes of a movie where the theatrical understudy continues to undermine the lead, and what follows are a series of struggles and failures. Sadly, power hunger is an appetite that is never satisfied. It is a bit like the proverbial statement that once an animal tastes blood their predatory behavior is unleashed.

I want to say that this never happens in the Church. I really want to say that, but I can’t. Whenever there is conflict in the Church most of the time a power struggle can be identified: Clergy versus Vestries, Bishops versus Diocesan leadership the list goes on. We now are seeing a proliferation of “golden parachutes” where for a period of time after the departure of the leader, the parish/institution continues to pay. Sadly, as I write this, I have either participated in or witnessed far more struggles for power among leaders who call themselves Christians than I would have imagined. Occasionally it is because there needed to be a change in leadership, but all too often it is because of a collection of strong-willed people. It is a bit like being able to recite the Ten Commandments and tenaciously judging others who break them without looking carefully at the Beatitudes to see how to implement the Ten Commandments. Terms like “mediation,” and “buy outs,” are now being used in the church having formerly only been seen in the business world.

Another tragic element in the power hunger revolution is to discover how some people very privately have determined who they must move out of power in order for them to move into power. They begin by determining who must be removed, and then they begin the process of selectively discrediting the one who is blocking their power hunger move. Sadly, in the Church we can hear people even used religious phrases (“The Lord has put it on my heart…” “I need to tell you what the Lord has shown me…”) Both statements are very good, and both statements are often very operative, but in the power hunger move, people even begin to attribute to God words that come out of destructive intentions that are not Godly.

I know that much of what I have written is harsh, but tragically most of my ministry has been spent listening to Clergy, Clergy Wives, Clergy Children, Lay Leaders, and the families of Lay Leaders who have shared their experiences. Simply seeing how many Clergy children fall away from the Church is breathtaking. In most situations they are not angry with what God has done or not done, but rather their anger and hurt are with those who call themselves Christians wondering why they act as they do. I want to tell you that this is not common, but once again, I cannot say that. My first real job in ministry was before I went to Seminary and it meant working with adolescent males who were sent to us by the court system. The number of clergy sons whom we received was breath taking, and inevitably they told their stories about their unhappiness with the “institutional church” and how deeply hurt they had been by seeing power struggles.

The issue at hand is, what can I do when I see people begin to lust for power and control? First, we must pray. Secondly, we must remember that God is a God of Order not of disorder, and when many Christian people engage in worldly patterns of behavior in the Church we must return to the Holy Scriptures and reconsider how the early Christians lived together.

To put it differently, the Bible has put before us patterns for “conflict resolution” that we must use as our models. The Church must not succumb to using secular business models that have not stood the test of time. Not all business models are transferable and the Church simply is not a democracy. The only vote that counts is God’s. He speaks — we act. The only power that matters in the Church is the Power of God. God gives Authority to His Church and He authorizes clergy specifically in the three-fold ministry and laity, by virtue of Baptism, to represent Him. Power hunger does not represent God. Pushing people out of our way as we race for recognition and more power does not honor God. The more God “empowers” us to represent Him the more humility we must assume. When the Apostles struggled for power, Jesus constantly reminded them that they could not expect the rewards of the world. “Rewards” in the Church and in religious institutions must always be different from the “rewards” of the world. Power bases run counter to what Jesus has taught us, and passive aggressive behavior is not a more “religious and polite” way of getting what I want for myself.

In the end, many a good priest or good lay leader has simply walked away from power struggles and we have lost some fine leaders in the process. In the end we are reminded of the remarkable distinction between “Churchianity” and “Christianity.” I have also, sadly, sat with deeply spiritual leaders: clergy and lay who after being a victim of a power struggle have simply walked away from their vocations. The person(s) lusting after power think they have won, but they may never understand the spiritual casualties that have occurred in order for them to have their transitory “victory.”

Many who read this may wonder why I have finally spoken about this. Those who know me well have heard me speak to these issues over the years, and so while I am still clear of thought and not falling off a ladder, I simply needed to advocate for those whom I have seen and continue to see who are either victims of those who lust after power or are victims of their lust for power. Often when I have counseled Clergy the conflict very often is over the power versus authority issue. All too often when we exercise a power mode we demonstrate arrogance and condescension - types of emotional bullying.

Lent is a very good time for us to look deep inside ourselves and to turn over to God all of our motives. Lent is also a very good time for us to seek God’s forgiveness for the times we have gossiped about others, repeated information without checking out its validity and slandered others simply because they got in our way; or not defended someone when false information was presented to us. Lent is a very good time for us to go to those whom we have offended and asked for forgiveness. Responsibility is a heavy burden to bear, and the only power that can lighten that load is the Power of the Holy Spirit the only power for which we must hunger.