

NOTRE DAME PARISH

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Behold the Lamb of God!"



When the Baptist saw Jesus, he proclaimed "Look! The Lamb of God!" While this title might strike us as enigmatic, the proclaimed title caused two followers to follow Jesus. Why? As gentle, docile animals, lambs were prized for their tender meat and fine coat; in other words, they gave all they had for their masters. The "Lamb

of God" referred to the sacrificial animal, slaughtered at the Temple for the Passover meal. (See John 19:14, 31, 42) In John, this was the same day Jesus was crucified. Jesus was the One the Baptist foretold, because he gave himself totally for his followers, even to death. "Look! The Lamb of God!"

MASS INTENTIONS

Saturday, January 16 @ 4PM
Nora Dotson

Sunday, January 17 @ 9:30AM
Dan Murphy

Monday, January 18 @ 8AM
Thomas Maloney

Tuesday, January 19 @ 8AM
John McClain

Wednesday, January 20 @ 8:30AM
Louise Gehrke
Andrew T. Krizman

Thursday, January 21 @ 8:30AM
Nora Dotson

Friday, January 22 @ 8AM
Roman Macudzinski

Saturday, January 23 @ 4PM
Joseph Meell

Oremus – Let Us Pray

- For a peaceful transition of government
- For recently deceased parishioners, Mary Ann Merrion and Gloria Godfrey
- For families who mourn
- For protection from terrorism, foreign and domestic
- For newly elected and re-elected government officials
- For progress in containing COVID-19
- For the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of other religions
- For Christianity Unity as we celebrate the week of prayer for healing

A Crisis of Discernment

We human beings like categories and absolutes. They are easier to manage than nuances and gray areas. By nature we are drawn to dualisms: good and bad, light and darkness, truth and falsehood.

However, reality is not so simple. An act of charity can be mixed with a selfish motive. An evil deed, such as child abuse, can be rooted in one's own victimhood as a child. A bomb might kill hundreds but also save hundreds. A truth can be wrapped in white lies. Not all truths need to be spoken out loud if they are destructive to the other person.

We are living in a time when trust is at a premium. Many in the mob that stormed the Capitol on January 6 are hostages to

QAnon fantasies. For a variety of reasons, many are filled with prejudice and hatred towards those with whom they differ. They do not merely disagree, they vilify. Some may truly believe what they are fed; others *want* to believe in conspiracies and provable falsehoods.

QAnon has been seeping into the Church as well. Archbishop Vigano, Cardinal Raymond Burke, and other bishops have been working against Pope Francis. Despite some of its inspirational programming, EWTN has been growing increasingly and deliberately partisan.

It would be nice if we always knew the truth, if our choices and commitments were painted in black and white.

Unfortunately life is full of gray



areas. That is why Saint John says, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Essential to every spirituality is *discernment*. Saint Ignatius of Loyola observed that Satan often cloaks himself as an angel of light.

Pay attention!

Father Keith & Rocco

HUMILITY – The Forgotten Virtue



On New Year's Day, many of us make resolutions to do certain things for self-improvement. The ancient Greeks thought that becoming a better person was the product of taking on certain traits of excellence, called virtues, traits like courage and justice. One learns virtues by imitation: imitate a good person, and you will become a good person. Two good men highly praised in recent weeks are Pope Francis and the late Nelson Mandela. They are leaders of a singular type – ones who embody a particular virtue scarcely seen in most leaders, but one that our society seems to hunger for: humility. Named for the humble saint Francis of Assisi, the self-effacing Pope has exchanged many of the ornate trappings of the papacy for simplicity. He

Continued on page 5



Easing a Guilty Conscience

by Colleen Arnold, M.D.

Recently, several friends came to me, feeling guilty about situations that didn't go the way they planned. I've felt the needling of a guilty conscience too, since God has blessed me with plenty of opportunities to make mistakes. I know how anxiety-provoking it can be. I'm a physician; I've seen patients die unexpectedly in the emergency department and been surprised by chronic illnesses in the office that didn't improve as I anticipated. I'm also a wife and mother. I felt guilty when my husband fell off the wagon of sobriety or one of my kids got in trouble at school.

It's easy to become paralyzed and overwhelmed by voices shouting in our heads: "It's all your fault!" or "If only you had done things differently!"

Sometimes those voices are appropriate, but other times we struggle with guilt over things that aren't our fault. How do we weed out the erroneous self-reproach to find the circumstances where true responsibility exists? How do we listen for and identify God's voice above all the noise?

Over the years, I've worked out a plan to quiet those critical voices. After I ask myself the four questions below, I pray with the Bible to open my ears and heart for God's answers.

Is the problem really mine?

One year, my newly licensed teenager hit another car in a parking lot. No one was around, and she didn't think any damage had been done, so she simply left and forgot all about it. It turns out there was damage done to the other car, and a witness wrote down both license plate numbers. An hour later a police officer showed up at our door.

I was mortified. Hadn't I taught her what to do if an accident occurred? Was I a bad driving teacher or a bad mom? I felt guilty for a week afterward until my daughter finally said, "Mom, this is my fault, not yours. Let it go!"

Feeling guilty because I can't control someone else's

Continued on page 4

(Continued)

actions is a mistake. People have the right to make their own decisions, whether it's my husband's alcohol intake or my daughter's driving habits. I can't control anyone's choices but my own, and I have no business trying. How can people learn from their mistakes or feel God's help if I am always getting in the way? Don't we all get annoyed when other people express unsolicited advice? If it's not mine, I need to let it go. And if I let others fix their own mistakes, I have more time to fix my own.

Did I do my best?

This is the time for an honest self-assessment. Was I too distracted? Too careless? Or worse, too selfish? Not long ago, one of my patients took an unexpected health turn and ended up in the hospital over Thanksgiving. I felt terrible and went back through his medical chart trying to find some clue I had missed. I looked over his meds and his recent test results, and, even armed with the knowledge of his current sickness, I couldn't predict his sudden decline.

I had to accept the fact that I had done my best, and there was nothing else I could have done to change the situation. I still felt sad my patient missed Thanksgiving at home, but I gave up the guilt. If I do my best, and things don't go as I planned, I can trust that God has the situation under control. God knows better than I do how things should turn out, and his

plans are always better than mine.

I don't need to understand his purposes to trust them. If I did my best, God's got the rest.

Is there a way I can fix it now?

I sat on the phone with one of my daughters, half listening and half looking at my to-do list. "Uh-huh," I said as I considered the litter box and my cleaning schedule. "Oh, really?" I muttered as I wrote two more things on the grocery list. "Mhhmm," I mumbled as I tried to figure out if I had enough gas in the car to run the day's errands. "Mom," she said, "so what should I do?" I told her, "Oh, I'm sure you'll figure something out, honey. I'll talk to you later, OK?"

Later that day, I stopped dead in my tracks, frozen in the realization that I had not been listening. I had been looking at the list, planning and figuring, and completely missed what my daughter shared. I felt my face flush a bit as the shame rolled over me.

I called her right then. What a horrible moment it was as I confessed not knowing what she had said. What a blessing it was as she forgave me and started the whole story over again.

Once we realize we've made a mistake, feeling guilty is not the only action to pursue. We need to determine a way to correct the situation if possible. This is a good time for prayer, for God loves to help us fix

2021 SOLEMN DATES

February 17, Ash Wednesday

March 28, Palm Sunday

April 4, Easter Sunday

May 16, Ascension

May 23, Pentecost Sunday

August 15, Assumption BVM

November 28, 1st Sunday of Advent

December 8, Immaculate Conception

December 25, Nativity of the Lord

Continued on page 6

Etiam (Continued)

has washed the feet of female convicts, kissed the face of the deformed, and made service of the poor and oppressed the center of his life and ministry. Nelson Mandela walked out of a twenty-seven-year imprisonment under the masters of apartheid to become president of South Africa. But as Dov Seidman, who advises C.E.O.s on governance observes, Mandela's leadership arose precisely out of the fact that he did not make the transition out of apartheid about him. By making himself small, Seidman argues, Mandela was able to inspire others to do the work of reconciliation.

Humility is not self-denial as such. Rather, it is having the character to acknowledge one's limits and debts in addition to one's strengths. Humility makes the whole greater than the self. It stands with the lowliest among us first. Among its fruits are gratitude, solidarity, responsibility, and reconciliation.

While humility is a personal virtue, there are two reasons for renewing our interest in it as a civic virtue as well. First, as Francis and Mandela illustrate, humility is an important source of moral authority, an essential element for the leadership necessary to reverse moral decline. The oft-heard criticism that politicians "just don't get it" is essentially a rejection of political self-promotion over service to others. Self-serving leadership cannot heal a nation's divisions. Mandela reached out to include his former enemies, rather than take revenge or seek their elimination. Think of how a little humility might have spared *us* the politics of extortion that caused the government shutdown, for example.

Second, the success of any dialogue on divisive issues requires that all parties place the common good and devotion to the truth above personal or special interest. Yet, humility also recognizes that no person, institution, or tradition possesses the entire Truth.

Aren't these the sort of things that people look for to ameliorate the growing cynicism and divisions in American culture and politics? One wonders why, then, in the worldwide outpouring of praise for Francis and Mandela we don't see more people acting like them?

The biggest reason, I suspect, is that our culture and its dominant institutions do little to foster the humble character. Spheres of real power—such as politics and business—rest largely on the values of self-promotion, individualism, and competition. And our culture encourages people to imitate the successful members of these spheres much more than it does the humble servant. It mistakes humility for weakness.

Religious traditions would seem uniquely situated to provide examples of those who humble themselves before others great and small. A moral tragedy of our times is that much of contemporary American Christianity, whose God comes humbly as a suffering servant, born in a barn, has accommodated itself too much to the dominant values of culture. Or at least it has often lacked the courage to provide powerful and prophetic critiques of culture for fear of alienating the comfortable. It strays when it emphasizes certainty in dogma rather than the humility of nonjudgmental love. That's why Pope Francis stands out as such a refreshing character.

Mandela's school in humility arose from the depths of suffering, another experience which, while not desirable in itself, has been expunged of any purpose in our times. It is rarely viewed as an opportunity for forming character.

So as we look into a new year with hope, perhaps it is time we hold not just ourselves but our leaders to the virtues embodied by figures like Francis and Mandela. Imagine political leaders congratulating their opponents for good ideas, or standing with the poor, rather than blaming them. Imagine religious leaders not claiming God's knowledge in doctrine but humbling themselves in service. Imagine people taking responsibility not just for their own behavior, but also for the behavior of those around them and for the social conditions that influence it.

But don't just imagine it. Expect it this year—of ourselves first, then of others. Maybe we don't all have the gifts to be as Pope Francis or Nelson Mandela, but I believe that we, and our world, would be better off if we tried.

what we've messed up. He also provides the strength to right our wrongs. Can I call a patient and provide a more compassionate explanation to her questions? Can I apologize to the family member I offended or take my neglected dog on an extra walk in the neighborhood?

Can I learn from it?

Some years ago, I made comments that deeply offended a friend. I apologized, but the damage was irreparable. Although we still see each other occasionally, we are not as close as we once were. We can't always fix our mistakes, but we can learn from them. Whether it be with a patient, family member, pet, or stranger, how can I keep from making the same errors over and over? Do I need more sleep? Do I need to trust God more? Do I need to learn to control my temper or deepen my generosity? This kind of evaluation helps me to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future and stretches me to become a better person. This four-question system isn't perfect, but it does help when the anxious, guilt-provoking voices start screaming in my head. When I finish my review, I give the whole process to God, who says: "Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen

you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand" (Is 41:10). I ask God to forgive what I've done wrong and to fix whatever I've missed. Amen!