# The Importance of Civility Amidst Our Differences

A couple of weeks ago on Friday, October 11th, we had at our daily Mass a reading from Luke 11, where Jesus says: “Every kingdom divided against itself will be laid waste and house will fall against house..” (Luke 11:17). Jesus is speaking about the importance of having unity in our souls, as a demon is driven out of a person. He’s accused by people who are gossiping about him and judging him that it’s by the power of the devil He’s driving demons out; He then makes the point that while a person may expel a demon, it can come back with other demons, but having God in one’s life can help a person overcome this.

There’s a lot that can be unpacked there, but one of the things that came to mind as I preached that day was the rally that was held at Target Center when President Trump came to town, which was the night before. I didn’t go to the rally or downtown, but I did see some of the footage on social media and some photos. One that stood with me was two people from either side each shouting at one another but not talking about much of anything; in another photograph I saw, a man is going into the rally while a person behind him, presumably having never even met him, is making an obscene gesture towards him. In another video, a rally attendee was being interviewed on live television when a person spat on the man, and he took it in stride saying “that’s okay.”

But then, there was also something very positive last week around the same time. I saw a video online of Ellen DeGeneres talking about some negative people who commented on her sitting next to President George W. Bush and his wife Laura at a Cowboys game in the owner’s box. She came on to her show, and in a humorous way, said essentially we really need to relax more and accept that we have differences. She has a friendship with President Bush but neither tries to force their views on one another, and what’s wrong with having friends who are different than you. Someone made the comment as they posted the video “this gives me hope for America.”

As hard as it is to believe we have another national election in a year, and who knows what will be going on then. But no matter if there’s an election coming up or not, there will always be differences between people. And differences are a good thing; but disunity is not. If we truly hate people because they are different from us, we’re not understanding that Christ came to die for all, and that when we receive Communion it is meant to remind us too of the unity of all people as God’s children; indeed “union” is a big part of the word.

So how then do we get to that balance where we can be different but civil? Where we can strive for unity while at the same time recognizing it’s important to talk about what we believe in and why and stand firm in our principles?

For starters, something I go back to time and time again is the personalistic norm; it stems from Saint John Paul II who taught that being one is created in God’s image, the only appropriate response to a person is love. And if we start there, so much falls into place. We don’t look at a person for their body only on a computer screen as some kind

of object; we don't look at a telemarketer as just an employee we can scream at for interrupting our dinner; we don't look at the teacher who gave our kid a bad grade as someone just out to get my child. We start by seeing the humanity, body and soul, and that really can help put other things into place.

We then think about how we respond to others. Anger is an emotion, but wrath is one of the deadly sins where anger gets out of control and we harbor resentment and grudges or truly hate a person. Arguing through isn't screaming; it's a way to understand people at a deeper level. Now are two people at a rally going to have the time to actually argue? Maybe not. But if I were going into a political rally and someone were screaming at me, I might actually say to them "let's talk. What is it that makes you so angry not knowing me but just seeing my t-shirt or hat?" Arguing helps us to understand the other person's perspective and maybe we can find common ground, but at least agree to disagree. T

Third, with that common ground, why not build new friendships? One of my closest friends who I've known since I was about 11 or 12 is the polar opposite of me politically. We're very different people; he isn't into sports; for me sports is virtually the only thing ever on TV when I'm home. He likes a steak medium rare and no sauce or ketchup; for me medium well is as low as I'll go and I brought ketchup packets to Paris just to make sure I'd have some at steakhouses there (and yes, they were used!). I think we could learn a thing or two from Ellen's wisdom in how she says she has friends who are very different from her in what they believe. If we close people off based on politics, religion, etc., we could be missing out on some great people who could help us on our journey to holiness.

Fourth, as they saying goes "kill them with kindness." If someone attacks you for your politics or faith, or they gossip about you, resist the urge to fight back with angry words. Rather remain calm and patient; try to have a conversation with them. Pray for them. What good does it to do keep upping the ante and trying to outdo a person or get them back? You'll go in an endless circle.

Fifth, as we argue, remember we do not have to be passive or fearful. Cowardice is the vice against fortitude, and we need to speak up for what we believe in. Next week for instance, I'll be joining some of our parishioners at the 40 Hours for Life event at Planned Parenthood to pray peacefully. Some will see us and be instantly fueled with hate; indeed the last time I was there a person drove by and just made an obscene gesture. But talking about what we believe in is important. Certainly that applies to the faith and moral teaching of the Catholic Church, but even in politics, I'd say be respectful, but don't feel like it's taboo to talk about because you lean one way or another.

Sixth, take some wisdom from Mr. Spock in "Star Trek" who was always stressing logic. Emotions can cloud judgment; if we just hate someone because of their personality without listening to their ideas, that's a problem. Hear people out especially in politics,

and look at their ideas and platform and how it conforms with you, rather than just instantly react based on a person's personality.

Seventh, think before you use Twitter or Facebook. Never forget that it's real people you are talking to, so try not to tear down but rather to engage in discussion rather than attacks.

And lastly, remember sometimes things don't go the way we'd like, but the sun still rises tomorrow and there will still be time for change. So when things don't go the way we'd like wether it's in the parish, in the country, in the larger universal Church, don't give up. Don't leave the Church or give up on America or a person because it seems things aren't going well or they'll never "get it." Rather, stay involved, stay passionate, pray for the person and about the situation, but through it all, be patient.

Every time I offer Mass, I am reminded that Jesus also challenges me to love all people, not just those who are easy to love, because His love was given without condition to everyone. May we strive to do the same and not let our differences destroy our souls and our relationships with one another.

Have a great week!
Fr. Paul

Book of the Week: Before the MEA break, I shared the book "***Christmas Tapestry***" by Patricia Polacco. A wonderful story of how God can work through people, it's a tale of a pastor and his family who move to Detroit to help a dilapidated church, but end up helping someone who is seemingly quite different than they are, an elderly Jewish woman, all because of love and compassion. A great read!