

God's Love is for All People

One of the things we are all aware of is polarization, and sometimes over politics and religion this can be quite intense.

Now of course, if you have a theological discussion, on the one hand we believe that one religion is not the same as no religion or any other religion. The reality is we do in fact believe that God is Triune, Father, Son and Spirit, and we do believe that Jesus established one, holy, catholic apostolic Church. One, not many. This is why we evangelize, why the Church has missionary activity, why we have RCIA, and why we reserve Holy Communion for those who are in full communion with the Catholic Church.

There are also firm moral beliefs we hold that cross over into politics too, such as the sanctity of human life, and marriage between a man and a woman.

I also believe that having a strong opinion can be a good thing.

However, up and down throughout human history, we can lose sight of how God loves all equally, and not some more than others.

The Second Vatican Council, in the document *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* writes: "Since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery." Our catechism also states: "Those who through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation." I truly believe that when we die, for those who may have had no opportunity to understand the Catholic faith, the truth of our faith will be revealed to them, and they will then have an opportunity to accept it fully.

This weekend, we celebrate Epiphany. Clues to its significance can be found when you look at the Magi in your nativity set. You'll notice one of them is typically a person of color. We of course don't know a ton about these wise men. It is pretty interesting though that the first people to recognize that the newborn Jesus was the king of the Jews, the long-awaited Messiah, were Magi from the East. They were outsiders, followers of Zoroaster, who had arrived at Jerusalem by following a star.

This feast is a reminder to us that Jesus is truly for all people. The challenge for us is to make sure we never forget that.

So how does one find the balance between being firm in what we believe and respecting others, and trying to be an apologist for the Catholic faith while not "force feeding" the faith to others?

With respect to the faith, we can invite people to Mass; we can pray *with* them not just *for* them; we can understand the faith ourselves so we can explain it as opportunities

sometimes present themselves. For instance, maybe a person asks you why you voted the way you do; you can talk about how the faith influenced your vote. Or why you wear a crucifix around your neck or what a rosary is if they see you praying it. Unfortunately people can get a negative view of Catholicism from the media, or from their family or friends, or even from their own church. This is why we can't simply just be nice and kind (though that is important) but we need to get past the fear factor and talk about what we believe looking for opportunities to do just that.

I think families are worth a particular mention here too where we can do this. For as people age, people can fall away. Families can have mixed religions too. Sometimes we can think "it's not my place" to say anything. But reaching out to adult children who have left the Church, reminding someone you are keeping them in prayer, and even talking to someone about a bad moral choice they made in a loving way, in private, can really plant some seeds. Remember, we share in the commission Jesus gave the apostles to evangelize, and we can't be afraid.

I also think we need to remember this truth of God loving all with respect to our political differences. Just because the election has come and gone doesn't mean opinions have changed much. As I said, holding opinions is a good thing; I have strong political beliefs like many. But we also need to learn how to argue and not shout, and try to listen to others and not let anger cause us to hate based on how one votes.

Finally, praying for those who are hard to love. In my time at Saint Joe's, I've come to know a number of people who are involved in prison ministry. A few years ago we had a conference for area parishes involved in prison ministry, and a speaker talked about how isolated he was from so many both in family and in society; but people reaching out to him helped him to get some hope back in his life. Anger is often justified especially when we are wronged, but we also must remember how Jesus mercy was extended to people like the Good Thief next to Him on the Cross; and Saul who participates in Stephen's death by throwing stones at him; or Matthew the tax collector who stole from his own people. We are so conditioned these days to be reactive with anger, but do we pray for people we don't like, be it a politician, someone at work, a neighbor, etc. It again goes back to God loving all people, equally, without exception.

I think in heaven we'll be quite surprised at who "made the list." But for people to go to heaven, they also need some help in finding the way there. We can do just that. That is why we can't just be like "birds of a feather" but must look for opportunities to evangelize and bring the faith to others. People generally don't need gold, frankincense and myrrh, but we all need a relationship with God. May we strive to do that for all the people God puts into our lives.

God bless,

Fr. Pau