

Encouragement Encouragement

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AN EASTER STORY...

THOU SHALT NOT KILL... CONQUERING DEATH

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We are surrounded on all sides by death and destruction- we are confronted daily by killing; in wars, uprisings, bombings and murder. It seems that the whole world is set on destruction, one way or another. Even nature seems to rage against us, killing thousands.

Reflecting on this month's Encouragement and realising it continues in Lent and then Easter I thought to bring these two facets together, one of new life and rebirth, the other our own mortality and the inevitable death, natural or otherwise, that awaits us all.

We are all children of the same Father – we share a common heritage and each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. We have the imprint of the Father's hand upon us and a heart that is made for love. It seems almost unbelievable that we, as children sharing a Father should go out to try to destroy, maim, and kill each other. We seem to regard others as different, or enemies, yet we are brothers and sisters. Moreover we are all interconnected in our common destiny. Yet we see from the start, Cain killing Abel and being ashamed of what he had done and frightened of the Lord's judgement even though God spared him the worst punishment of banishment and being murdered himself.

Not a comfortable thought indeed for we still consider murder a heinous crime against a neighbour or family member. There is still moral outrage at such events and rightly so. Even in the case of Cain, the Lord had warned him not to be tempted, but He also spared him being murdered himself (a case against capital punishment perhaps?).

Most of us turn away from the images portraying violence in war torn places of the world and also see war as significantly different to killing in a murderous way. We justify war if it suits our perspectives or safeguards our interests. We become distanced from the person and driven by an 'ideal' or philosophy. So detached can this be that we see no harm in the slaughter of whole nations, tribes or religions. Clearly self-defence of our families or neighbours is vital but always with regret and deep sadness, if it does involve violence. There have been those too who, even if their safety was threatened did not retaliate.

Sometimes there seems to be no easy solutions to the settlement of disputes involving nations, but do we reflect on the call – *Thou shalt not kill* – and pray with zeal that fighting will stop?

Once our passions are involved and engaged we seem to lose our perspective of being peace-makers and the imperative of seeking vital justice *peacefully*.

We condemn radicalisation as an evil, misusing the term as applying to those who incite acts of terror for pseudo-religious reasons in order to gain power. But the really radical aspects of the Gospel require us to do the exact opposite of this – to love our fellow members of earth as God has loved us. Yes, this kind of radical approach could transform us – but do we let it?

The healing of the wounds of killing is often difficult too, but there are many instances of forgiveness offered by those whose approach to love is *radical*.

Fr. Werenfried van Straaten understood the healing power of forgiveness when he encouraged Dutch, British and Polish people after the war to share their belongings with many others who were enemies; he begged for clothing and food for those now destitute in villages in Germany who had been perpetrators of killing their sons and daughters – many people gave and found healing. Many churches were rebuilt, leading to the charity now known as Aid to the Church in need.

We even coin the phrase 'mercy killing' – for euthanasia – and how abhorrent is that use of those contradictory words. Death will come to all of us and it can be peaceful too. We must ensure a lack of pain as far as possible and not prevent the certainty and inevitability of it – but not determine the day or hour.

But if at this point you feel 'Well, all well and good but I never kill anyone, I am against violence of any kind, hate war, and so I do not need to worry about this commandment or think about this in lent' - *then please think again*.

This commandment has many aspects and repercussions and like so many of the 'thou shalt nots' can be confined to a very narrow interpretation of their ultimate meaning: There are many things to take into account when thinking of 'killing'...



"Let us be sorry that we are not sorry!" St. John Paul II



Let us look at some other aspects of the way we ‘kill’ that we do not consider as breaking the bonds of love and charity that are behind *all* the Commandments, especially this one.

A school playground or office – children at play, or banter behind the scenes in an office or workplace- but groups and sub-groups emerge and sometimes for no obvious reason one person is made the scapegoat for all bad things or because someone knows they are different or do things in a different way. They become bullied for the sake of conformity or power. Sometimes it is minor, other times it becomes so persistent and determined that the victim cannot bear to go into the school or workforce- is this any less a killing, if the person, as happens, withdraws completely or in the worst case takes their own life? Words can kill too.

What about gossip? Very often this is said without any certainty of either the truth or the ostracising effect it has on the individual. Gossip can kill friendships and cause the end of communities... even church groups can fall foul of this one. Surely speaking well of someone or withdrawing from the conversation can be a good witness to a call to heal.

What about slander? Worse than gossip but one can lead to the other. To deliberately kill the character of another person without any reason or merely a dislike of colour or a prejudice is truly an attempt to destroy them. Often it is intended to minimise their importance. Deliberately to slander or calumnise another person is to kill their reputation. It is a right to have our good reputation. Even when an ‘ill’ truth is known we have to be careful how we use it – unless another person or a child is in danger if we withhold the information.

Then there is the ‘simple’ lie – that prevents justice being done or takes away respect. If we lie we offend the Holy Spirit – and to constantly lie puts us in a position where truth becomes subservient to honesty and integrity and leads to a kind of shut-down to truth. Lies, deliberate falsehoods, can kill, withholding truth no less than lying.

How many times are we responsible for not speaking out when truth needs to be maintained, especially about our faith or injustice? This too can lead to another killing and that is of our spirits. How often do we consider this aspect of our faith? **Truth does not lie.** If we live our lives in untruth – not facing our errors or admitting our sins – we effectively kill off our soul. Truth cannot lie and if the Holy Spirit lives in us we will be led by that truth. If we harbour lies we harden ourselves to truth and shut down. The heart becomes like a stone and dead. Once we explained sin as ‘killing the soul’ – now a statement like that would be considered outdated and irrelevant – but is it? Truth will lead us to truth. A lie or lying can only lead us to what is false – and death.

Lenten Alms..? Funds urgently needed to save a school in Pakistan – please see our website (bottom left)

Finally, discouragement: How easy it is to put down others and kill that spark that may indeed be the ‘little fire’ that is inspiring others. So often we see real ideas killed by the resentment and jealousy or plan of others. Never kill ‘the things of the Spirit’, as St. Paul says. This is a real danger in many of our communities and we wonder why we do not thrive?

But now to Easter and new life!

Jesus too underwent death at the hands of others, endured insults and persecutions, lies and manipulation but was the conqueror. We are bidden not to behave like sinners but to try and stay on the path He set us. But Jesus willingly suffered all so that we would be free and ‘live’. Instead of killing He gave us a command to love one another and our God – and He witnessed this on Calvary and in His daily life.- He truly conquered death – not only by rising from it in actuality, but by allowing us to see the truth and showing us how to live it. *He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.*

At Easter, with the Paschal candle we are reminded of this reality. If we ponder these words in our hearts and act on them we will gain a spiritual wisdom that truly leads to eternal life with Jesus, both now and forever. He is a God who saves - Out of death to life – Dare we not follow Him?

Halina Holman

Dear Brothers and Sisters, a Happy and Holy Easter

The Church throughout the world echoes the angel’s message to the women: “Do not be afraid I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised... Come, see the place where He lay. This is the culmination of the Gospel, it is the Good News par excellence: Jesus, who was crucified, is risen This event is the basis of our faith and our hope. If Christ were not raised, Christianity would lose its very meaning; the whole mission of the Church would lose its impulse, for this is the point from which it first set out and continues to set out ever anew. The message which Christians bring to the world is this: Jesus, Love incarnate, died on the cross for our sins, but God the Father raised him and made him the Lord of life and death. In Jesus, love has triumphed over hatred, mercy over sinfulness, goodness over evil, truth over falsehood, life over death. That is why we tell everyone: “*Come and see*” in every human situation, marked by frailty, sin and death, the Good News is no mere matter of words, but a *testimony to unconditional and faithful love.*

Pope Francis Rome 2015

Prayer.....For the sake of Jesus’ painful/sorrowful passion,
have mercy on us and on the whole world.

Chaplet of Divine Mercy

Feast days in March....

1st St. David 2nd St John of God 17th St Patrick
19th St Joseph. 4th Women World Day of Prayer
Holy Week; 20th Palm Sunday 24th Holy Thursday
25th Good Friday 26th Holy Saturday
27th Easter Sunday Happy and Blessed Easter to ALL