

The Tragicomedy which is Now

Sometimes one doesn't know whether to laugh or to cry, hence the application of the Shakespearean word "tragicomedy" to this title. From the standpoint of this priest, the institutional Church is a mess, and country is a mess and the world is a mess.

You can dismiss this as exaggeration if you wish and, for sure, we could all imagine things being much worse than they are now. For me, however, there are conditions for the possibility of it being much worse going forward.

As a result of the clergy abuse scandal, the leadership of the Church seems to be turned in on itself and unable to speak the prophetic word or proclaim the Gospel message until it is purged of its corruption. Those of us operating at the local level of Church governance feel the sting of skepticism and mistrust quite acutely. No matter how forthrightly we try to be, there is no "forthright enough," for many people. Credibility is in the dumpster. It seems like death by firing squad or self-immolation in the public square will be the only thing which wins back any shred of credibility. What an un-holy mess!

And what about the nation? The economy is booming! I guess that is a good thing. Everything else, however, operates at the level of the lowest common denominator. There are no high ideals, but only cynicism. Self-interest has completely displaced any sense of the common good. Politicians don't care about the nation, but only their party and their constituencies. And you will tell me, "*Well father, that's the way representative democracy works!*" Well, then, to hell with it! "Constituencies" are people and if a people have been sold on "self-interest" without any sense of sacrifice or common-good, then we have devolved into a Darwinian state. From what I read and hear in the news, I fear we are heading in that direction.

The problems of the nation seem a microcosm of the global scene. Nationalisms and tribal power struggles are displacing tens-of-thousands of people from their homes and countries toward frontiers where they are not welcome. It is the same old process of dehumanization we've seen countless times before in history. Its easy to let kids in Yemen starve to death because they don't look enough like our kids or, at least they are far enough

away that I can't see the ribs busting through their skin. A little girl in Syria speaks to a television reporter and expresses her hope to one day have a potato to eat. What damnable atrocities!

Meanwhile, popular culture lampoons everything and we get a little bit of relief from a good laugh. But the effect is only temporary. All of the insanity is still there to be reckoned with as new revelations of abuse, corruption, back-room-deals, physical abuse, murder and treachery come out. And, my fear is that this default to the "lesser angels of our nature" is something like pressure building up behind a weak and crumbling dam: it may all give way in some catastrophic manner such that things will become so much worse.



Apologies for being so "apocalyptic" but my conscience is tweaked and part of my job is to tweak the conscience of others along the lines of faith. This is what John of Patmos does for the churches of Asia Minor in the Book of Revelation. The dominating culture in which the churches operate is that of the Roman Empire whose emperor claims to be a god. And it is not just the religious pressures which are problematic for the Church, but the social mores are insidious. Rome celebrates violence, sexual excess, idolatry and raw power. These are not always coercive powers, they can be seductive to any and every community. John the Prophet sees this clearly and calls it out into the light. He sees a cosmic battle for souls in the contest between "the beast" and "the Lamb."

Events in our Church, nation and world indicate the relevancy of John's message in Revelation. We will be offering a Lenten study of this cryptic book from the Bible. Consider joining in if you have the time and curiosity. No prior experience is needed. See the announcement in this bulletin for more details.