

Aug. 20-21, 2016

Thoughts from the pastor,

Next Sunday is the parish picnic. It is too far away to know what an accurate weather forecast might be but we are Nebraskans and are known to sit at sporting events that have crazy weather. So I hope you don't let that keep you away. This really is a very important event for the parish. We have very little time to get to know each other during the rest of the year. This is your chance to get to know more of the parish family. There are a couple things to remember. **There is no 5:30pm Mass next Sunday.** There will be a 1:15pm Mass in French with Fr. John Zotoglo as celebrant if you would like to attend. I hope you have purchased a few raffle tickets. Since I am usually the one drawing the names I never put my name on a ticket. I always figure it is a chance to help out a family who might need the win, so I put their names down. We are looking for volunteers to help with some of the booths and activities on that day. That is also a great way to get to know people. It is also a way for the students to get their service hours started. This will also be a great time for many of you to meet Fr. Mario Rapose, who is with us this year.

I was recently asked a question about how we justify the Old Testament God who smites people and had the Israelites wipe out people. They wanted to know how that fit with Jesus in the New Testament who we are always told is so loving. Here is the explanation I came up with.

For most people the confusion comes from the idea that the love of Jesus trumps any bad behavior we can come up with. The OT shows us that there are actual consequences to our actions and they can be deadly. Many preachers have begun to ignore that Jesus did not change that scenario. He didn't personally smite anyone but he warned us that it can happen. The Sermon on the Mount has all sorts of references to damnation. Mt. 5:20; "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Mt. 5:21-30; "whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment...and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna." In terms of lust he says "It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have our whole body thrown into Gehenna." Mt.6:15; "But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions." Mt.6:21 gives us an idea of how this can be reconciled with a loving God. "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." God loves us enough that He will not force us into heaven if our heart is not with Him. It is not easy to give Him our heart. Mt.7: 13-14; "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road broad that leads to destruction, and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few."

So what was going on with the mass killings that God did or ordered in the OT. These are meant to be examples of the above teachings of Jesus. But the reality that we conveniently forget is that everyone dies. But Jesus explains to His disciples in Mt.10:14-15; "Whoever will not receive you or listen to your words—go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet. Amen, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town." And then in Mt.10:28; "And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna." In other words being smited as an example by God in the OT might not mean they are all condemned to hell. But we do know that Jesus is warning us that we had better listen to His warnings or we will not get to heaven.

So is this "wrath" of God unloving? What would be truly unloving would be to take away our free will and force us all into heaven as robots who no longer can decide to love or not. It would also be unloving to leave us all as we are, with our free will, and let us spend an eternity where those who are evil are free to harass those who are good. That would not be good parenting. We offer direction and the children decide if they will be good. When we make choices against God we pay a price. Hopefully we learn the lesson from the OT and the NT before it is too late.

God bless you,
Fr. Frank