

Well, the 9/11 memorials are winding down now after the 20th anniversary of that tragic day. They'll continue, of course ... for a few years, at least ... but less and less as the years and decades pass. That's just the way of things. Fewer and fewer people will be alive to remember that day—the emotions, the pain, the outrage. Remember the silence in cities when all planes were grounded and/or diverted to Canada? We need only look at December 7; it seems hardly noticed anymore. It would be interesting to poll high school students to know how many even know the significance of that date. As time passes, we get caught up in our daily lives and immediate concerns and have less time to think about the past. Especially in our fast-paced world, one concern is quickly replaced by another.

Tragically, even Christians can very quickly forget virtues that they are taught and may practice daily when their or their families' welfare is hurt or endangered. After 9/11, angry phrases like "Nuke 'em! Make the Middle East a parking lot!!" were not uncommon." Hmmm ... I just don't remember wholesale elimination of populations being approved in the New Testament anywhere. But when the cubs are in danger, mama and papa bear often simply react rather than think.

We can easily fall into very worldly—very primitive—reactions such as to hate enemies and to want revenge. "They bloodied us ... now it's time to bloody them." "They brought a knife; we'll bring a gun" attitudes. And so easy to lapse into bigotry and generalization ... to lump all persons of an identifiable group into a category of blame or hatred. Yeah, well ... so did Hitler; you want to be like him?

In the days just after 9/11, hatred for some Muslims becomes hatred for all Muslims—the actions of twenty-ish led to hatred of a billion. Hatred for some Middle-Easterners becomes hatred for all Middle-Easterners ... very much like the suspicion, uprooting and sequestration of Japanese Americans during WWII, even though we claim to abhor that event. If we hate whole peoples, how are we not unlike those who flew into the towers?

When one begins to hate a people or group for something, it soon becomes to hate ANY people for anything—until it is only MY culture ... MY race ... MY people ... and, finally, people of MY way of thinking, who are worthy of oxygen. Do we not see this sort of thing increasingly on social media? "If you don't approve/disapprove of what I do ... you're an idiot!!"

In such things, we Christians need to step back and remember that our life upon this earth is only the tiniest part of our eternal existence ... and yet how we act during these few moments on earth will determine how we will live for that eternity. In that we need to remember one of Jesus' most adamant, if not a most difficult to follow, teachings: "To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." This can certainly prove to be one of those "the gate is narrow and the road hard that leads to life" and "you must carry your cross daily" challenges ... but that doesn't negate our obligation to do so.

Certainly a nation or people, or even an individual, has the right and even responsibility to protect citizens, family, self, and even strangers from harm; even the Church teaches this. And while we are called to forgive, we are not called to be naïve, but rather realistic in expectation ("Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16)). But Christ forbids vindictiveness, hatred, bigotry. Ultimate judgment belongs to God alone, and St. Paul writes: "...never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" (Romans 12:19) That word "vengeance" may ring harshly in our ears, but God is all justice, and thus whatever penalty He metes out for evil will unquestionably be that which is just.

Christians believe the existence of only two types of people in the world: Those who know and love Christ, and those who have yet to come to know and love Christ ... for He is the culmination of all goodness and truth, and the answer to what the soul seeks. We of the first category are entrusted with the task of converting those of the second ... with our works, with our charity, with our teaching, with our example ... and with our prayers. And so, rather than cursing and hating, O Christian, rather live up to your name and ... Act. Like. Christ!! ... praying for them instead, for it is through conversion to Christ and only through love of others for Christ's sake that peace can come about. And "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons and daughters of God." (Matthew 5:9)

In this task it's helpful to remember that prayer reputedly of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:

where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console,

to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

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Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them...Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:31-36)