

# SILK PURSES AND SOW'S EARS

*Very Reverend Glenn Jones*

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

(Reprinted with permission, *Los Alamos Daily Post*, July 15, 2024)

Wow. Apparent assassination attempt on former president Trump (July 13). I think the last one was against President Reagan by John Hinkley Jr. back in 1981, just a couple of months after he was elected, and then Pope John Paul II's assassination attempt a couple of months later. Much more will come out about this in the next few days. It would be hard to deny that Trump's getting up and vowing to continue the election fight right after getting shot was pretty dang impressive—reminiscent of when Reagan quipped to his wife Nancy in the hospital: "Honey, I forgot to duck." With all the vitriol on both sides, we ask and pray for calmer days and a peaceful election.

While eclipsed a bit by the above, we *do* want to wish a happy Bastille Day (July 14) to all of you from France and/or who have a French connection or heritage—quite the historic day in France's history. Being a movie aficionado, I always think of that great scene in "Casablanca" when the patrons at Rick's Café Americain spontaneously break out in the *La Marseillaise* in reaction to the Nazi officers' singing the German anthem. Great movie.

I know, I know ... "What does that have to do with Bastille Day?" Well, they both refer to our innate human struggle to live in freedom.

That desire to live freely is a driving force for our humanity; we hate to be caged or restricted. For instance, we who live in Albuquerque, and no doubt in many other cities and places, are regaled daily by a seemingly infinite number of "muscle car" drivers eschewing law and trying to conquer one another in street contests. This has pretty much been the case since automobiles came on the scene—the primarily male trait to exert dominance leading to street races before autos were horses, and footraces, etc., from the dawn of humankind. If not seeking to have the fastest, then the prettiest, the most expensive, or the rarest—the human desire to rise above the rest of the crowd. We DO love to posture.

"But," I often think: "...what can YOU do? Will your self-worth be determined by a machine and ability to push down a gas pedal? In what way do YOU excel in yourself and in your own actions?" Maybe the drivers are accomplished ... but maybe not.

There are many phrases—some for use over centuries—describing posturing or even deception that we humans tend to do: "You can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear," "lipstick on a pig," "ring of gold in a swine's snout." And then one with a more nefarious connotation, "wolf in sheep's clothing."

How many times, under closer inspection, do facades disintegrate? Maybe the driver trying to impress by street racing misused his family's meager funds, or it was bought for him by someone else and thus acquired by no particular income production of his own. Or, as is seen not infrequently, a trumpeted idea or "discovery" is pilfering of another's work or thoughts—intellectual property theft. Or, as is seen more during times of military actions, "stolen valor," in which some falsely proclaim by words or dress false military or law enforcement exploits. Any of these, and others, can result in much embarrassment, shame, and even possibly criminal charges once exposed.

Yet the humble and the sincere need not have such concerns. They present themselves either on their true—or even lesser—socio-economic level and/or eschew deception or braggadocio of any kind. They are the "what you see is what you get" kind of folks or even hide their own often impressive achievements. Who do we admire more—the braggart or the humble?

In the Christian context—or any moral context whatever—sincerity and humility mean living in true accord with your beliefs. As we read: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Living ardently and sincerely a Christian life can be, of course, difficult; after all, Jesus doesn't say: "The gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life" (Matthew 7:14) for nothing. The sincere Christian is called to live counter-culturally and counter-intuitively in their arena. He is called to love one's enemies when the world (and gut) applauds and desires retribution. He is called to not enrich oneself or hoard material things when we find security in wealth. He is called not to condemn others but to (try to) rather guide them from selfishness to self-giving for others. He is called to forgive when such is the last thing we feel like doing.

But, O Christian, how will you draw the self-absorbed to greater goodness by yourself being selfish and self-absorbed? How do you draw another to forgive if you refuse to forgive?

Like the firefighter, police officer, soldier, and Christian can't fear entering the fray for the greater good. That means that, while not compromising his morals, the Christian must be willing to meet his neighbor where the neighbor already is, not unlike Jesus dining with the tax collectors or Paul and companions going to the Gentiles—not to endorse their ways, but rather to draw them toward the greater good. But if we Christians stand aloof, are we not being hypocritical—a sow's ear parading as a silk purse? How can we draw others to the goodness of our faith if we refuse to engage? Or worse, condemn out of hand?

To draw others implies establishing a relationship, and to create a relationship requires amity and amiability, graciousness, and acceptance of others in their person, if not their ways. Maybe the more we try to do so rather than spew venom in the various venues we participate, the less violence and the greater camaraderie we'll find—a work not for a day, month, or year but for a worthy lifetime and more, and one of the greatest works of all.