

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
February 3, 2019
Homily for the Anglican Usage Mass
of the
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Luke 4:21-30

Our Gospel this morning demonstrates that our own age is not the first to see large numbers of people who propose death as the solution to perceived difficulties. Jesus' own neighbors, the people who had watched him grow up in Nazareth, decide after they feel insulted that they will kill Him. After Jesus notes that "no prophet is acceptable in his own country," the people prove him right and try to throw Him off a cliff.

Of course, they don't succeed because the Son of God does not let them kill Him at this point. His time had not yet come. But we will see this same attitude rear its ugly head as we approach the Lord's Passion—how Caiaphas proposed killing Jesus for the benefit of the nation; how the crowd screamed for Jesus to be crucified as Pontius Pilate weighed his options; how Pilate finally decides to kill Jesus, an innocent Man, in order to placate the crowd.

This ancient attitude is unfortunately all too present today, and we see that familial and national bonds do not exclude its proposal. Just as Jesus' own neighbors wanted to kill Him, we saw that just one week ago today Muslim terrorists in the Philippines blew up a Cathedral in Jolo, killing twenty people during the celebration of the Holy Mass. These weren't foreigners who did this, but the faithful of Jolo's very own neighbors. We don't have to go half way around the globe to find it, however. We have it here. Over a million times a year in this country, parents are complicit in the deaths of their own children. *Roe v. Wade* made it possible. Our hardness of heart sealed the deal.

But contrast the tyranny of death as the solution with the beautiful words we heard in our Epistle today: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." That sounds like the society we want to live in, not one defined by the fear of death. We don't want to wonder if we might be the next problem that our neighbors will solve through murder. We would much rather give and receive the compassion St. Paul describes in his letter to the Corinthians.

In meditating upon this contrast I thought of St. Marianne Cope, whose feast day each year in God's providence falls the day after the anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision. She is famous for her willingness to leave her country, sail to foreign lands, and literally devote her life to caring for lepers. Robert Louis Stevenson was a contemporary of hers and met her in Hawaii. He was so impressed with her work that he dedicated a poem to her, which I shared with all the students of Maria Kaupas Academy on January 23rd. The poem is short but says in essence that St. Marianne Cope's love and work is proof for the existence of God.

Here was a woman who gave her life to those who had been rejected by their neighbors. The Hawaiian government had not proposed death as the solution; but, having been exiled to the island of Molokai, the lepers of Hawaii were dying, alone and unloved. While most people winced and turned

away, desirous to save their own skins from a disease that devoured its victims, St. Marianne Cope volunteered to charge into the fire. Leaving lepers to die alone on an island was not Love's solution to the problem. Love's solution was to suffer with the suffering. Love's solution was to be patient and kind and to endure. The result was the salvation of souls, those the world had abandoned now part of the body of Christ.

Believe it or not, we have been witnesses to this type of love over the course of the last month or so. The scale of the good work is much smaller; but it is by no means insignificant, as it involves the willingness to help those who are struggling, which issues in transformation.

I talk a lot about the necessity and the beauty of being open to life, and praise be to God, this orientation has taken hold in the hearts of many of our parishioners. We have a lot of children here, but bringing little ones to church every week is hard, especially if a three-year-old has siblings that are younger. How does one keep a baby quiet while controlling a toddler who seems was born to run? An openness to life has to be reflected in more than a willingness to bear children. We must also help those who need the help. Love's solution is not to give condemnatory glances or to wince and turn away. It is even less the solution my pastor preferred when I was growing up at the Episcopal Cathedral in Bethlehem: He once said from the pulpit, "Get that boy out of here!" Love's solution is to be patient and kind and to endure.

So, over the course of the past month we have seen a transformation in my goddaughter. When she misbehaved, her parents would take her out. They once had to leave before even receiving holy Communion. Some Sundays after Mass, I would hold her and tell her how we're supposed to comport ourselves, but my lectures had little effect. The change came when a godmother offered her help. Some babies had to be passed around to other godmothers, but the effect of these expressions of love has been a transformation in the back half of our church. My goddaughter is now the angelic cherub we have prayed she would be, because love's solution is patience, kindness, and endurance. How much better that is than impatience, cruelty, and exclusion! We are blessed to have mothers happy to wade into the fire and put it out.

The witness of St. Marianne Cope stands astride this Church, for all of us to wonder in amazement at her sanctity and love. All of us can admire her, but if we are to attract more people to the proposal that love is the solution, not death, our neighbors will need to see love like that of St. Marianne Cope emulated in our parish. Concrete examples like what we've seen in this transformation of my goddaughter must define who we are. And if that's the case, the sky's the limit for our parish.