

Homily
1LentB
St. Bernard Church
February 22, 2014

Title: "The Noah Principle"

Jesus tells us in today's gospel: "The kingdom of God is at hand."

This raises the question: "How do we enter the kingdom?"

The principles of success in spiritual life are quite different from the principles of success in what we call normal life in the "real world."

The cross: Does that look like success?

Yet the suffering of Jesus Christ is the most powerful event that has happened or ever will happen on the face of the earth.

So to be successful in our spiritual life, we have to think in a different way than those who don't think spiritually.

If you were here on Ash Wednesday, you heard the priest doing our Lenten mission, Fr. Simeon Gallagher, refer to the famous Christian writer, C. S. Lewis.

What Fr. Gallagher said, based upon a book by C. S. Lewis, was that being a nice guy can actually be one of the biggest obstacles in Christian spiritual life, one of the biggest obstacles to entering the kingdom.

Here is a specific quote from C. S. Lewis:

"Niceness" is an excellent thing... But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world-and might even be more difficult to save.

Why is being a nice guy a problem?

Well, let's see what it takes to enter the kingdom.

Here's a passage in the Bible that is rarely quoted. I'll bet it seems new to you, but it gives us a clear, straight answer to our question.

It's from Luke 16:16:

“The law and the prophets lasted until John; but from then on the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone who enters does so with violence.”

Repeat. “Every one who enters the kingdom does so with violence.”

What does that mean?

Whether we realize it or not, there is a battle going on every moment of our existence, a battle for our souls, a battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the saints and the good angels against Satan and the bad angels.

We can't just be nice guys, because we're in a battle. We have to know there's a battle going on. We have to be willing to enter the battle. We have to prepare ourselves, train for the battle, and then we have to fight.

Where's the battle? Who do we have to fight?

We have to think of a spiritual battle in spiritual terms.

We have to remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28:

“... do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

So, yes, ISIS is evil, but ISIS is only a threat to our bodies, not to our souls.

The real evil, the threat to our souls, is the evil in our own country that is dragging us down as a nation and the fact that we're not doing enough to confront these evils.

The real evils are things like our high divorce rate, our sexual promiscuity, pornography, the abuse and neglect of children, domestic violence, euthanasia, and, the very worst of all, over 50 million abortions. And by the way, a national debt of \$18 trillion dollars which we will pass on to future generations is also a great evil.

What are we doing to confront these evils in a time when people think the greatest offense is to be critical of another person's choice? Can we say that we have really entered the battle to take on all these offenses against God?

I fear that too many of us, including myself, have been content to be just nice guys.

Let me give just one example:

Kelly was a beautiful, bright 19 year old girl. Single and pregnant. She came to us when I was at Catholic Charities just to get our point of view. During her meeting with us, she expressed her frustration. She blurted out that none of her friends, and not even her parents, would tell her what they thought she should do with respect

to having the baby or having an abortion. She said everyone just told her, "Whatever you do, I'll still be your friend." They wanted to be nice.

Kelly ended up not following our advice. She had the abortion. The abortionist failed to remove all the parts of the baby. Two weeks after the abortion, Kelly developed an infection which resulted in her death. The failure of people to speak up, to tell Kelly what was the right thing to do, may well have cost 2 people their lives.

If, as a nation, we are going to fight evil, whether it's ISIS or some other evil, how do we get God on our side? After all, it's God's power that will decide who wins or loses in battles between good and evil.

We get God's power by acknowledging that God is in charge of our lives and being obedient to Him, which includes obeying all of the moral teachings of the Catholic Church, ALL of them, and by confronting evil where it exists. We can be nice but there are times when we have to be confrontational with ourselves or with others.

What does all this have to do with Noah?

Noah was not just a nice guy.

It says in the Book of Genesis that when God saw the wickedness on earth, he decided to wipe out from the earth the people he had created.

But Noah, and only Noah, out of all the people on the earth, found favor with the Lord, and God started a new covenant with just this one man.

Noah didn't go along with the crowd. He wasn't popular. He wasn't normal. He chose to be different. He didn't care what anyone else did.

He decided that God was his boss and he would be faithful to God, even if he had to do this all by himself, completely alone.

I'm asking all of us, this Lent, to think about Noah. Here are some questions we can ask ourselves:

Am I soft and flabby spiritually? Am I too concerned with what other people think of me? Am I willing to put God first in my life, even if it means being completely alone?

Am I willing to enter the battle against evil in our own country? How do I prepare for this battle? Where does God want me to fight?

I have this image of Noah pulling away from shore in his ark. I don't want to drown. I want to go with him. I waded out to the boat and call out to Noah. He sees me, and I can tell that there is a sadness in his eyes.

Then I realize that, with all of the sin, all of the evil that had been going on in and around me, I was content to be quiet, to be passive, and even at times to accommodate the sins of myself and others.

Please join me in praying:

Lord, Jesus, we all want to be nice. But we don't want our niceness to be an end in itself. We don't want niceness to keep us from doing your will. We don't want niceness to keep us from confronting sin in ourselves, sin in those we love, and sin in the world. Help us, Lord, especially during this Lent, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to see in ourselves and in our world what needs to be confronted and overcome. Give us the grace and the courage to rid ourselves and our country of all that is evil. And help us, Lord, to be one with Noah in your kingdom, this day and forever. Amen.