

HEALING AFTER PITTSBURGH: UNITED WITH OUR “ELDER BROTHERS”

On a busy Saturday morning bouncing among several meetings, the news traveled to me very slowly and I readily admit I was not up to speed on the severity of the attack inside a Pittsburgh Pennsylvania synagogue. I did not initially think it would become the **deadliest anti-Semitic** attack on U.S. soil. That this could happen in 2018 beggars the imagination, but it happened. Though the murderer’s venomous views would not be allowed on most social media platforms, he evidently sought out other, little know venues that allowed his hateful rhetoric to be disseminated to those who sought it out. My bulletin series on sins that grieve the Holy Spirit can wait one week, as this horrendous act most certainly grieves the Holy Spirit and ought to motivate us to step up and be counted.

Cardinal Avery Dulles was arguably the best-known Catholic theologian from the U.S. in the last century. He wrote extensively on many issues of ecclesiology, but also touched upon the complicated topic of Jewish-Catholic relations. I will summarize some of his teaching here. He was rewarded with the “red hat” after his 80th birthday as a tribute both to his holiness and his prolific work on behalf of expounding the faith, not only to fellow professional theologians, but every day people like us. He is as readable as he is profound. He was also extremely careful and precise, which is exactly what I desire in a theologian. One cannot speak of Jewish-Christian relations without reflecting upon the Covenant. At its heart lies the promise: “You shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:28, Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 7:23, etc.).

Occasionally I pray the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer at Sunday Mass during Ordinary Time, with its own dedicated preface that must accompany it. While a beautiful prayer, it also might raise an eyebrow trying to understand it. It speaks in praise of God, stating: “Time and again you offered them covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation.” Notice the use of **covenants** in the plural. One may call to mind: the covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17, in which he promises never to destroy all living creatures by a flood again); of Abraham in Genesis 15:5-6 or 17:4-8, and God’s promise to make him the father of many nations; finally, of the promise to David to give to him an everlasting kingship (cf. 2 Samuel 7:8-16, to name but three. In this sense he offered many covenants, but in another sense we speak of one covenant, commonly called the “Old Covenant.” It is not a pejorative sense, nor does it imply that it has been invalidated. Catholic teaching is clear– “the Old Covenant has **never been revoked**” (CCC para. # 121, emphasis added). Rather, we see Jesus Christ as fulfilling the Covenant by means of the Paschal Mystery– his life, death and resurrection, the New Covenant sealed in His blood.

In his address at the synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986, St. John Paul II stated: “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.” Catholic tradition sees the two covenants as intrinsically related. The Old is a preview and promise of the New; the New is the unveiling and fulfillment of the Old. Vatican II teaches: “The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant.” (Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, para.#4)

The stain of Antisemitism is impossible to deny and horrific to behold, though typically it is quite subtle and beneath the radar. I myself recently witnessed a situation in which someone inexplicably made reference to a “Jewish lawyer,” out of nowhere– it was stunning. Others have experienced similar dismissive tones with respect to bankers or media moguls. But in Pittsburgh, in a stable and long-standing Jewish neighborhood? Wasn’t indiscriminate killing the stuff of high school history books discussing World War II? Sadly, it is not. We must **confront** and **acknowledge** this scourge. While acknowledging our own Jewish roots in the faith, we continue to spread the Gospel by giving powerful witness to our faith in Jesus Christ, without hesitation. The two can co-exist peacefully.

May we grow in our understanding of the pain of our Jewish brothers and sisters and stand with those grieving over the loss of eleven innocent souls who simply came to pray on the Sabbath– nothing more, nothing less,

all due to a cowardly act of hatred. We also pray for the full recovery of those who were injured. The above-mentioned document, *Nostra Aetate* (para. #4), includes this fervent prayer: “In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and ‘serve him shoulder to shoulder’ (Zephaniah 3:9).” I close with the words of Psalm 29, which express both a fervent hope and a prayer for all God’s people: “May the Lord give strength to his people, may he bless his people with peace.”

- I urge you to take seriously your civic duty to vote this coming Tuesday. We are called both to be faithful Catholics and to be active in the public square, bringing our well-formed consciences to the ballot box. Well-formed means doing your homework on key issues. I am amazed how few Catholics know that Senator Tina Smith was a former Executive VP for Planned Parenthood MN, a fact conveniently scrubbed even from her own official online biography.
- For background, you are encouraged to read the USCCB document **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship** (usccb.org), following the links to the document. Also consider visiting the website of Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (mcl.org) for helpful insights on respect life issues.
- Lebanon is justifiably proud of its ancient Catholic roots in the Maronite tradition. Nearly 70% of the nation’s students attend private schools, 20% of which are Catholic. But a new government law ordering salary schedules could be devastating. Public schools rely on tax levy increases, but the Catholic schools receive no such aid. This scenario is all too common. Funding Catholic education is tricky. Parents already pay taxes– they need to pay twice with tuition.
- I am suddenly receiving “**screen time**” notifications on my iPhone 5, the latest of which informed me that I am 1 hour and 43 minutes **below average** in my usage. I have no clue as to their provenance. Call it the sin of pride, but I generally cringe when being described as “below average.” Apparently, I average three pick-ups per hour– I have no idea to what that even refers. Could some 20-something parishioner please tell me what on earth is going on with my phone?
- It is a salutary practice to **pray for the dead** and for the souls in purgatory, especially during the month of November. Please consider offering a Mass for a deceased loved one such as on the anniversary of his or her death. Light a candle in one of the chapels or at one of the altars in the Shrines of the Nations.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector