

“HOW LONG, O LORD?”: THE ROOT CAUSES OF SOCIETY’S MALAISE

After 13 years, I’ll admit that my Italian skills (never very good) have significantly slipped. But when I awoke early on Sunday, and per my custom, read the Pope’s Angelus address (5:00 a.m. local time is Noon in Rome), I did a double take. Why did the Pope just mention the bloodshed (*insanguinato*) in Ohio in addition to Texas? What on earth is he talking about? I checked out a news website only to learn that a second fatal shooting had occurred about 13 hours after the first. The 13th psalm (*Quamdiu Domine*) came to mind: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” Saint Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4:30: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption.” How could the **Lord not be grieved** at what he sees, with such violence and murderous thoughts seething in the hearts of some of His people? This mind-numbing helplessness characterizes the aftermath of yet two more mass shootings. How long, O Lord?

While differing in motive, each reigned terror. The first was clearly a hate crime emanating from a 21-year-old man spouting white supremacist ideology. The other shooter (age 24) described himself as a pro-Satan leftist (who wanted socialism), who despised our President and listened to pornogrind music with sexually explicit and violent, death-obsessed lyrics. Diametrically opposite in political views, both seemed to be social outcasts. Try to imagine yourself for just a moment, whether shopping on a Saturday in a Wal-Mart in **El Paso, TX** or walking on a street at closing time in downtown **Dayton, OH**. Suddenly, the lives of more than 30 innocent souls were snatched for no apparent reason other than racial hatred or rage against humanity. El Paso, the nation’s 21st largest city, is home to 696,000 residents, while Dayton counts 140,000 souls. It prides itself as the “birthplace of aviation,” being the residence Orville and Wilbur Wright. While clearly not “small town” America, neither city has seen such an incident as was witnessed last weekend. **Chicago** recorded **55 shootings** last weekend alone— that’s right, 55 in one city.

In an online posting, the El Paso gunman lamented that his WASR 10 rifle, a variant of the AK-47, couldn’t match the lethal power of an AR-15. A key difference between civilian and military rifles is the degree to which when the trigger is held, multiple rounds fire. Equally important is the ammunition loaded into the weapon. Some bullets are much more lethal due to the ability to fragment upon impact, thereby increasing the likelihood of lethal wounds. This too was **intentional**, as the Dayton shooter fired 41 shots in 30 seconds from his modified .223-caliber rifle that was fitted with a **100-round** drum magazine. Unbelievable. Surely, support for the 2nd Amendment ought not to preclude **serious questions** about that capability in a civilian weapon. But last weekend, brave police officers are on video rushing **towards** the shooter, preventing his entrance into a crowded bar, where the loss of life would have been catastrophic.

Before a cure is possible, an **accurate diagnosis** is essential. What ills face our nation such that young adults feel so disconnected, disengaged and disenfranchised? The epidemic is at its core a loss in the meaning of life for too many. Last Sunday after Mass, I encountered a pensive young man visiting from Eastern Europe. He asked to speak with a priest; it was clear he was seriously thinking about life, but at least was searching. Placed on the spot, I was asked to explain my understanding of the meaning of life, i.e. **why does anything** matter? He appeared fascinated with demons, asking pointed questions, including about Renaissance artistic depictions of evil. He had done his homework! In that moment, I prayed silently as I mustered my best **30-second elevator speech** about the meaning of life. It is good to be challenged like this, from a sincere and seriously questioning young man. He forced me to consider how we might best reach those who are searching.

My takeaway? We had better be ready with an answer. The Letter of St. Peter (1 Pt. 3:15-16) reminds us to— “...sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear...” If people ask us how to make sense out of society’s malaise, do we as faithful Catholics have any clue how to answer? We surely struggle, but need to look deeper than sensible legislation, mental health protocols, as absolutely necessary and overdue as they are. They are but part of the picture, but neither gets to the **heart of the malaise**.

Young men too often **lack a relationship** with their **fathers**, with any faith-based youth groups, and any real

exposure to **genuine human interaction**. They are trapped in a fantasy world, be it (often violent) computer games and music. Add in the rampant scourge of pornography and you have a volatile mixture. Yes, the media speak about the men being outcasts, nerds, loners—fill in the blank. It may all be true, but it is not exhaustive. These are aimless young men, devoid of an experience of living one's life for another, the essence of the Christian life. The human heart searches, too often in vain, for meaning. May we redouble our efforts to proclaim the saving truth of Jesus Christ, offering answers, offering people a reason for our hope. In these troubled times, this is no less than our solemn duty.

- If you own securities and investments, I hope you too are in it for the long haul, and not for a quick turnaround. I half regret referencing the stock market crash of 1987 in my homily last Sunday (as an example of how quickly things can change in life), after seeing what happened last Monday! That could all change quickly if a new trade deal with China ever comes to fruition.
- It has been a busier summer than perhaps is typical, but I have taken in at least a few **Minnesota Twins** games, most recently this past week. It is wonderful to see the stands packed and the enthusiasm level so high. There are quite a few solid teams in the American League, and time will tell how far this team progresses. But they cannot be counted out of any game with their ability to “go deep” and do so multiple times in a game.
- What an honor to host more than 60 priest Chaplains of the **Knights of Columbus** last Monday, along with 6 bishops. It was an incredibly sultry day, but I am delighted they had a chance to visit the Cathedral. A little inside baseball—priests love to visit other Cathedrals, snooping around, checking out the bulletin stanchions, literature racks, confessionals and side chapels. Hey—it's just what we do!
- It is time to **register for Religious Education** classes beginning next month. I invite parents to go online to our parish website. Simply click the link. Wednesday classes for our children begin the first full week after Labor Day, September 11, 2019 for most sections.
- See the August 14-15 **Assumption** Holy Day Schedule in the sidebar.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector