

MOST WORTHY LOYALTY

Very Reverend Glenn Jones

Vicar General, Vicar for Clergy, Vicar for Religious

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The last few weeks have been notable for an emphasis on patriotism. First is Memorial Day, in which we primarily commemorate those who died in wars defending our nation, its interests, and freedom in general. Then, a couple of weeks later, we commemorated the 80th anniversary of D-Day—the invasion of Europe by the Allied forces to ultimately free it from Hitler’s totalitarian grasp. This coming Friday, June 14, Flag Day, was established by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 to commemorate the adoption of the Stars & Stripes as the national symbol, which was later affirmed by Congress in 1949.

These days, people like to criticize the U.S. and all its historical (and present) blots and blemishes, but there is no Utopia anywhere in the world. Slavery, yes ... but the U.S. also abolished slavery at the cost of several hundred thousand dead in a Civil War when, as civilization advanced, there came recognition of the evil of slavery despite its existence for time immemorial in all cultures, such that it could no longer be tolerated. Yes, injustices, crimes, hate ... these can be found in every society. As the third most populous, and possibly the most diverse, nation in the world, there is going to be strife between groups in the U.S. simply due to multitudinous differing cultures and values.

And yet ... millions seek to enter this country even now. One might point to the fact that this weekend, thousands of people demonstrated even at the residence of the national executive, knowing they have the right to voice their opinion. They weren’t machine-gunned, rolled over by tanks, or otherwise suppressed as they very likely would have been in many other nations. Agree or disagree with the protesters’ premise that the right to protest is certainly something to be thankful for.

Should we acquiesce to every whim of civil leaders? Obviously not, though in a democracy or democratic republic, the majority tends to rule. Yet the majority does not make right. It’s like the old analogy of two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner. Americans might point to our history of slavery, Manifest Destiny, and subsequent depredations of native populations in the U.S. and around the world, etc. ... but where has prejudice, hatred, strife, and exploitation of peoples existed? Yet where we live IS our community and society, and we are morally bound to try to improve it as best we can through our work, advocacy, etc. This is duty wherever we might live, because what we do affects other persons, not just some soulless theoretical entity.

So ... in general, what should capture our deepest loyalty? Most people would quickly reply “Family!” and, indeed, family is likely the foundation for our lives and love. Every culture honors family; it is the very building block of society. But should it have our utmost loyalty? What if the family turns criminal, or does/condones things that are morally repugnant? Is it family first in all circumstances, right or wrong?

I would say “No.” Using the old parental “if your friend jumped off of a bridge, would you do it, too!?” analogy, we need to have our own mind and hold to our moral compass even when others—family or not—go off the rails. “But they’ll be angry with me. They’ll ostracize me!” Well, if they do, that would be sad, but it would be their failing, not yours; at least you can still know that you did

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what is right rather than succumb to pressure to do wrong. Is that not the very definition of “character”?... of “courage”—forwarding oneself into a situation that may prove disadvantageous. Even disastrously so, for the good of others?

Most Christians, of course, at least claim that following Christ is by far their utmost loyalty, for since we believe that He, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is truly the eternal God and the absolute good and that our eternity depends upon that loyalty, what would be the point to do otherwise? To not do so would be trading an eternal, unlimited treasure for a temporal penny if we did not always do our best to remain loyal.

In the Catholic Mass readings for this June 9, we pick up the Genesis Creation story at the point where Adam and Eve were hiding themselves from God because they realized their failure in having eaten the forbidden fruit. But see if this sounds familiar when we are tempted: “...the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6) One fell, the other followed, even though both knew better. Sound familiar? John echoes this same theme with a warning: “... all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world.” (1 John 2:16)

In the same Mass’ Gospel, we read of the episode in which Jesus’ blood relatives have come to visit Him while He is teaching His disciples, and He says to those who informed Him: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Mark 3:33-35) Contrary to what some say, He was not dismissing His blood relatives, but rather affirming that loyalty to which His true followers would have—to love God above all, and to love neighbor as oneself: the two great commandments, for these are the will of the Father.

Being a good Christian is simple—not easy, but simple: remaining loyal to the good ... remaining loyal to God. All other true duties, loyalties and obligations are eclipsed by, and subsumed into, this one principle. For, if we be not loyal to the good and to the right, we are disloyal to all.