

## Daily Devotional, June 10, 2020 **Ambassadors of Christ, Not of Division**

I remember when I did voluntary chaplain work at the Stateville Correctional Center, the maximum security state prison just outside of Joliet. The inmates had very little freedom and their days were scheduled for them. Each of their meals were scheduled at the same times each day. Activities were closely monitored, and some inmates were kept isolated from the general prison population. Despite these rules, some inmates still assaulted others and threatened guards and staff. It seemed most were always scheming to negotiate a way around the rules of prison life.

To get to the head chaplain's office I had to go through a metal detector, two electronically locked gates, several long corridors and if my partner and I had to go to a more restricted, more dangerous area, we were given an armed escort. Prison life had a different set of rules and the risk of violence was all too real.

Division was everywhere. The obvious one was between the guards and the inmates. Some were between guards and staff, others amongst the prison population. When you put high risk violent offenders and armed guards together, these divisions create greater tension.

The divisions made it very difficult to feel safe. Even with the armed escorts, there would be occasional catcalls by inmates. Once you passed the first gate, there was no place that division didn't appear. Even in the small shared cells, you could often see the tension between cell mates, as sheets or blankets might be strung between bunks for separation.

So how does this fit into a devotional today?

Many people do not feel safe. The coronavirus has us on edge, afraid of the risks of contamination. Instead of respectful disagreements, there is violence and attacks. The recent peaceful protests that have been taking place, have at times been hijacked by violent anti-government forces. Even some of our politicians and prominent figureheads are calling for civil unrest and defunding of police departments. It seems they want division. Granted, there are some within our many individual police forces that are usurping the power that has been entrusted to them, and they need to be weeded out. These individuals do not represent what is good in the hearts of those who have been betrayed by these divisive bad apples. Without their brave and trustworthy service, we would live in a lawless society of no rule enforcement.

It seems that there are people who thrive on division. When they do not get their way, they attack. Wild accusations against those who do not share their beliefs lead to unrest and lately violence. There are no compromises just division.

I suppose why I am reminded of the times I volunteered at the prison, are the threats that abounded then and that are seemingly out of control now. Much prison violence is orchestrated by gangs and power struggles. Isn't that much like what is taking place right now, especially in the political arena in the United States?

Christians are supposed to love. Yet we are also called to be separate from the corruption in this world. How do we do this?

Working as a chaplain in the prison, I walked a fine line. I tried to live the truth of God's love without allowing the hatred surrounding me to affect me. I believe this balance is what is needed today. We must love each other and love those with whom we disagree. We must not be dragged into the toxic poison of hatred or violence. Ultimately it does not matter which side of the political spectrum you are on. What really matters is that you stay on the side of Jesus Christ.

Look beyond the circumstances and keep your eyes focused on God. Remember that as a believer in Christ you are also an ambassador for Christ. Ambassadors do not get involved in the civil affairs of the nations in which they live, rather they represent the leaders of their own countries.

Our citizenship is in heaven, our leader is God. We are called to pray for our earthly leaders, not attack them. So, let us pray not just for our leaders but for all those led astray by any agenda that seeks to destroy and divide. The changes we want do not have to be violent. We need unity. We are called by Christ to be unifiers!

***A Prayer of Jesus: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me— so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Amen.      John 17:20-23 (NIV)***