



St. Anne
CATHOLIC
COMMUNITY

September 2, 2012

Twenty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. Religion (worship) that is pure and undefiled is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction..." James 1:22 & 27

Dear Friends;

"Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly is to name the world, to change it...Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection."

These words of Paulo Freire (Brazilian philosopher, educator and worker for the disenfranchised) are similar to the sentiments in today's reading from the Letter of James. Pious thoughts, warm fuzzy feelings and good wishes are not enough. If we truly want to be connected to God we must enact his justice in the world—not in some future time or place but now! This means that we also must confront falsehood and injustice.

There are two philosophies that are making resurgence in our society. They are similar and both contradict the Gospel and teachings of Jesus. Ironically they have found themselves wedded to social religious conservatism that stands against abortion, birth control and marriage equality. They are the philosophies of **Social Darwinism** and the philosophy of **Objectivism of Ayn Rand**.

Social Darwinism is a philosophy that has a distorted reading of the scientific work of Charles Darwin. It first became popular in the late nineteenth century—the age of the robber barons. At this time the vast majority of wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few—like the Vanderbilts, Carnegies, J P Morgan, Crocker etc. This was a time when a great many were immigrants and lived in grinding poverty. These were looked on as the underserving poor.

Social Darwinism was used to justify the inequalities. In the 1880's William Graham Sumner put it this way: *"Civilization has a simple choice. It is either: liberty, inequality and survival of the fittest or non-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society and favors its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members."*

Ayn Rand, a Russian émigré, was an avowed atheist. Her philosophy of Objectivism denied that one can know anything from religious faith. She railed against altruism and charity. The two basic laws that drove objectivism was 1) the *law of selfishness*, this superseded everything including love. 2) The *laissez faire market economy should be absolute*; nothing should ever regulate or impede the market. This was a philosophy where there is no room for God; and freedom is defined solely as the absence of regulation.

These philosophies seem to be at work again in our society. It is implied in much political rhetoric. It was reflected in the budget that was recently passed last spring by the House of Representatives. This was a budget that has been criticized by the U. S. Conference of Bishops and they spelled out their objections in four letters to leaders of the House.

The teaching of the Church has been clear through the centuries. Taking care of the least of society is how society should be judged. This does not mean solely through charity (the free-will giving of individuals) but also through the structures of society. Catholics are called to ensure that society and its government act in ways that are consistent with justice including distributive justice. This was most recently expressed by Pope Benedict in his letter Charity in Truth (*Caritas in Veritate*). In the Catholic sense freedom is not defined solely in the negative as 'Freedom from.' But freedom is defined in the moral tradition as 'the ability to do good.'

The U.S. bishops ask us to evaluate three moral criteria when we judge the actions of society and its budget. 1) *Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.* 2) *A central moral measure is how it affects "the least of these" (Matthew 25.) The needs of the hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.* 3) *Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.*

Social Darwinism and Rand's philosophy of Objectivism are opposed to Gospel values. Jesus came as the self-gift of God. He invites us to do the same. If our faith is going to be pure we must put the Gospel first by enacting it in our lives and the world. Jesus calls us not only to work for solely our own good or to save our individual soul, as in some sort religious version of Rand's law of selfishness. James makes it clear we must work for the common good with our eyes always toward the least and lowest.

And we are not working for just some future pie in the sky. We are here and now to enact the compassion and love of God and the kindness of the Kingdom. Taking our cue from St James let this be our guiding principle.

Peace,

St. Ron