



A journal for restless minds

AN INDIFFERENCE TO LIFE

A perception of value

LOCKED DOORS

Overcoming our fear

DEACON'S DINER

Food for a restless mind

Colloquī is a Deacon's Corner weekly journal. Its mission and purpose: to encourage serious discussion, to promote reasoned debate, and to provide serious content for those who hope to find their own pathway to God.

Each week Colloquī will contain articles on theology, philosophy, faith, religion, Catholicism, and much more.

Be forewarned! Articles may and often will contain fuel for controversy, but always with the express intent to seek the Truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God.

An Indifference To Life

A perception of value

When you lose a thing, anything at all, how do you react? Your reaction and any subsequent action should be ostensibly commensurate to the value you held for that which you have lost, should it not?

Should one lose a single strand of hair, one's reaction would likely be to give it but brief notice. After all, such a singular loss must occur with quotidian regularity, nothing more than normal hair wear-and-tear. Should, however, one glance in the mirror upon rising and note one's head completely hairless,—knowing full well, whereupon retiring the previous evening, one had possessed a full forest of formidable frolicking follicles—one's reaction, we should suggest, would be quite a different matter altogether.



Here one must ask: why? What difference does it make? Why the insouciance at the loss of a single follicle, and yet, the utter inability to maintain one's composure upon beholding a bare bald bulbous bean?

The difference is a question of perceived value, the regard one holds for a thing, its importance or worth. Value, of course, is never constant; it is inversely

proportionate to the dearness one holds for a thing: familiarity diminishes it, unwanted or unexpected loss warrants a necessary increase. John the Baptist said as much in comparing his own perceived value against that

of the Christ, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Value can be relative, as the old adage "One man's trash is another man's treasure" portrays, yet, not in every case; there are some things which are inestimable, beyond measure.

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Locked Doors

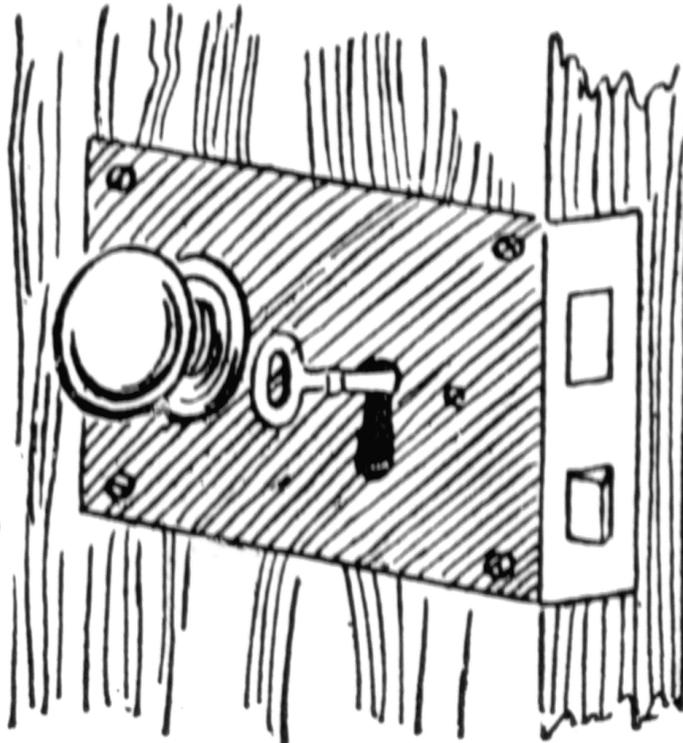
Overcoming our fear

There is always the tendency, whenever we arrive at this point in John's Gospel, to focus our attention on Thomas' initial disbelief and his subsequent obeisance to the risen Lord. His acknowledgement, "*My Lord and my God!*" was a pivotal moment for him, as well as for all of the disciples of Christ, for in making such a statement, Thomas admitted, what until then, none had believed: that Jesus was truly God.

And, while this was indeed a defining moment in the life of the early church, there is another, equally important point which ought to be emphasized and considered. We heard at the very beginning of the gospel today: "*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst,*" and after showing the wounds of his crucifixion to them to prove that he indeed had risen from the dead, he says to them, "*As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*"

This should lead us to several questions: Why were the doors locked? Why did the disciples fear the Jews (weren't they Jews themselves?) And what did Jesus mean by his statement? Before we suggest answers to these questions, however, let us look briefly back to last week and then at the other readings for this week.

Last week, at the Easter Vigil, we came together as a community of believers to welcome twenty-seven new members into the fullness of our Catholic faith. At least for that brief moment, all who were present were a community of believers of one heart and one mind as we heard in the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. And the second reading emphasizes being a community of one heart by loving God and loving God's children.



From what we read in Acts, the early Christian community was a utopian society: one heart, one mind, no one claiming anything as their own, all were respected by all, there were no needy among them, and where there was need, the community provided what was necessary for the good of all.

Hearing all this through the lens of history raises doubt in our minds as to whether such a utopian ideal was ever a reality. Certainly, there is much to be commended for desiring such a soci-

ty, but could it have ever been, could it ever be? Logic and reason cast doubt on the possibility, history has, as yet, proven it to be but a dream. That doesn't negate the vision nor does it invalidate the Christian ideal for living as Christ taught us. It only serves to point out what we are called by Christ to reach.

What this passage from Acts tells us is that whatever socio-economic system we, as Christians and followers of Jesus Christ, espouse, it should be a system that provides for the needs of all by allowing equal opportunity for all the people. As Pope John XXIII wrote in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*: "*A well-ordered human society requires that men recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties.*"

What must be emphasized here is the mutuality which must be recognized and observed. Rights that apply only to a few or a subset of any society are not rights but preferential discrimination. And then, there is the other half of the equation which is too seldom mentioned: duties. Rights obligate a duty; such a duty is wholly bound by the one who claims the right, society has but one duty which is to protect the mutual rights of its members.

Whatever utopian Christian community is presented in the first reading, accounts of the earliest Christian community—of a community hidden

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behind locked doors, of a community hiding in fear—reveals a darker side to the earliest followers of Christ, in stark contrast to the later view of Christian living. Immediately after the crucifixion, the despondent disciples are found huddled in fear behind lock doors.

The Gospel shows a community in turmoil, full of fear, disappointment, and disbelief. Thomas represents all of this by his refusal to admit to the resurrection, *“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail-marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* Surely others felt the same, especially those who had not yet seen the risen Lord.

But why were they behind locked doors, huddled in fear ... of the Jews? The disciples were afraid because of what had just happened: one of their own had just betrayed them all, the mob in Jerusalem had demanded crucifixion of their leader and master, the Romans had acquiesced to their demands and brutally executed their teacher and friend. Their dreams had been smashed, their hope mocked, their faith challenged, friendships destroyed, their futures forever altered.

No question, we would have been as much afraid as they were. Fear is both an emotional response and a biochemical reaction to a perceived threat or danger or to the unknown. Fear may lead to paralysis, panic, stress, or tension; it is part of our human nature, embedded in our DNA. It helps us survive.

We humans like to pretend we have no fear, yet despite our pretensions, we do experience fear. Some of our fears are concrete and real: heights, snakes, violence, pain, and death; others, in the shadows of our dreams or visions beyond the known, irrational fears that come at us from our subconscious, nightmares and unreasoned thoughts of what lies ahead.

The disciples had every reason to lock their doors and sit in fear; every reason to be afraid of the concrete and frightened of the unknown. And then *“Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you. ... Receive the Holy Spirit.’”*

Immediately, Jesus gave his faltering, fearful flock a commission; he told them to go out, to quit hiding behind locked doors, and he breathed new life in them with the Holy Spirit. He knew that the antidote for fear is mission, the cure for grief is to reach out to others, the salve for broken dreams is to create new ones.

As he sent his disciples out then, so he sends us out today. He sends us out to where people huddle in fear. He sends us out to conquer our fear of the unknown. He sends us out to those who live in panic, whose dreams have been smashed, whose hope is gone, whose faith is challenged. He sends us out, but not alone, for as you go, Jesus is always beside you. Amen.

Homily for the
Second Sunday of Easter (B)
Acts 4:32-35
1 John 5:1-6
John 20:19-31

Deacon's Diner

Food for a restless mind

For those restless minds that hunger and thirst for more. Each week this space will offer a menu of interesting and provocative titles, written by Catholic authors, in addition to those referenced in the articles, for you to feed your restless mind.

BOOKS

On Conscience
Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Ignatius Press
2007, 82 pages.

Society and Sanity
Frank Sheed
Sheed & Ward, New York
1953, 270 pages.

Strangers in a Strange Land
Charles J. Chaput
Henry Holt and Co.
February 21, 2017, 288 pages.

PERIODICALS

First Things
Institute on Religion and Public Life
Editor: R. R. Reno
Ten Issues per year.
www.firstthings.com

Touchstone
A Journal of Mere Christianity
Editor: James M. Kushiner
Bi-Monthly.
www.touchstonemag.com

Catholic Answers Magazine
Share the Faith, Defend the Faith
Editor: Tim Ryland
Bi-Monthly.
www.catholic.com

Yet, what is of inestimable value lacks universal concurrence. There are those who would construct reality and truth through subjective lenses, existing at the center of a universe subject to personal feelings, opinions and vagaries of thought—each holding to their own truth, their own reality, and to the corresponding values for all they believe or imagine to be real and true.

The world has turned upside down and inside out, where the best one may hope to counter the malodorous nonsense so enthusiastically endorsed by the vociferous mob may be that suggested by the Dodo: a Caucus Race where everyone runs in a circle with no clear winner.¹ Neutered epicene confusion doth run amok; “*We have met the enemy and he is us.*”²

The relativist knows no God for there are gods abundant, attested by one’s own self-absorbed narcissism. God—if considered at all—is but an afterthought, a mythical spirit conjured in one’s alternate reality.

Of course, as with all such things, godhood is of relative value to the relativist. For most, the subjective reality in which they exist rests in the subconscious; their stuporous minds oblivious to the obvious. They are quite incapable of or—perhaps worse, given their own self-induced ineptitude—unwilling to accept a reality not of their own choosing.

Their self-importance rebuffs objection; no light as bright, no monument as high, no life as cherished, for all the world’s their stage and all the

players are but marionettes upon it, there to be manipulated and controlled under the direction and pleasure of their relativistic whim.³

Narcissism engenders an indifference to life, even to one’s own. Such indifference sets a low bar; life is no more valuable than one’s image of it. *Cogito ergo sitis*—I think therefore you may be. What value a thought; what value then of life?

Relativism is the philosophy of Satan, the father of lies, just as Jesus taught those who questioned who he was and from where he had come: “*If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies*” (John 8:42-44).

Relativism, in all its variations and forms, denies the truth, that is to say, objective, rational, real, universal truth, rooted in the nature of the way things are. Subjective truth is but a fabrication, a distortion of reality, built upon a foundation of lies. It is a lie, in and of itself; and none can—neither God nor angels nor human nor any being—bear witness to a lie and declare it truth. The father of lies knows this but conceals it by sugar-coating his poisonous brew to make it honey on the tongue.

Subtlety is the devil’s forte, none are better, as we find written in Genesis, Chapter 3: “*Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God say, “You shall not eat of any tree of the garden”?’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’*”

Oh, to be like God! How could anyone possibly resist such a temptation? Such cunning and guile did Satan use to prey upon the weaknesses of mortal man. It was clearly a bald-faced lie but so smooth were his words which stroked their egos and played soft upon their weaknesses.

Note the devil’s inversion of what John would later so humbly admit. The grist of the serpent’s cunning was in the lie he so subtly told; he was not so bold as to openly suggest that God must decrease in order for man to increase, yet that was precisely the gist of it. God must be brought down, remade into man’s image and likeness, in order for man to become like God.

What disheartens the soul is how so much remains the same now as then; should I dare suggest the devil may even have an easier time of it now? Man still aspires to divinity, still falls for the serpent’s tale, still believes the creature capable of self-creation.

Such hubris serves only to increase Satan's grotesque power over man. Like lambs to the slaughter, Satan plays a siren song upon our nescient souls and salves our insatiable egos with such sweet nothings, all to entice the unwary further away from the love of God.

Make no mistake, the devil is the quintessential relativist; relativism is the devil's defining creed. Before the garden and man's fall from God's grace, there was a being, though not man, who would be like God.

In the beginning – before the beginning – God in His perfection created angels, archetype of the soul; immortal spirits “*stamped with the seal of perfection, of complete wisdom and perfect beauty*” [Ez 28:12]. God who is all good and beyond all perfection, brought them into existence and gave them gifts beyond imagination and placed them on His holy mountain, “*in Eden, the garden of God*” [Ez 28:13]. And the first of these was the morning star, Lucifer, son of the dawn.

For all his power and favor with God, Lucifer was dissatisfied, and he said “*I will scale the heavens; above the stars of God I will set up my throne; I will take my seat on the Mount of Assembly, in the recesses of the North. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will be like the Most High!*” [Is 14:13-14]

Thus, God's magnificent creation fell to the temptation of desiring more, of being like God. He created his own reality, defined his dominion over man, subservient creatures he could manipulate and control, all so as to

come between God and man, to turn man's eyes toward himself and away from God.

Yet, sending souls to hell is not the devil's game; the souls of men are but pawns to be used, then tossed upon the fires of hell. Satan cares for naught but his own self-aggrandizement; his sole aim a delusion: to make manifest his own reality, his own truth. What irony his only recourse: to proffer self-same godhood to the likes of men, thus devaluing that which has, for so long, been his presumptive claim.

God loves us, the devil uses us, and therein rests the difference. Love is God's greatest gift to us. Our capacity to love is what differentiates us from all other living creatures. Love is the measure of what we value, the scale upon which we weigh the truth of our existence, and the clear and certain guide to lead us home into the everlasting loving arms of God.

Satan cares not for love, for indeed, he is quite incapable of knowing it; to the devil it is but a hindrance, an obstacle to his own malevolent desires. His relativism knows only the absence of it, his damned soul rotted by a bitter brew of all-consuming hatred for all that is good.

The devil is the master of evil and the father of lies, the consummate promoter, a dealer in the deadliest of sin: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, envy, and gluttony. The products he panders are empty promises clothed in false dreams; he deals in death not life, hatred not love, enslavement not freedom, lies not truth.

All sin presumes a lie, an offense

which in every form stands in opposition to the truth.

What offense does not depend upon its denial? Whether through deceit, deception, dishonesty, evasion, fraud, perjury, duplicity, infidelity, disloyalty, betrayal, dissembling or denial—these are no less a full accounting of lying to oneself or others—the sinner must of necessity feign innocence to the greater sin.

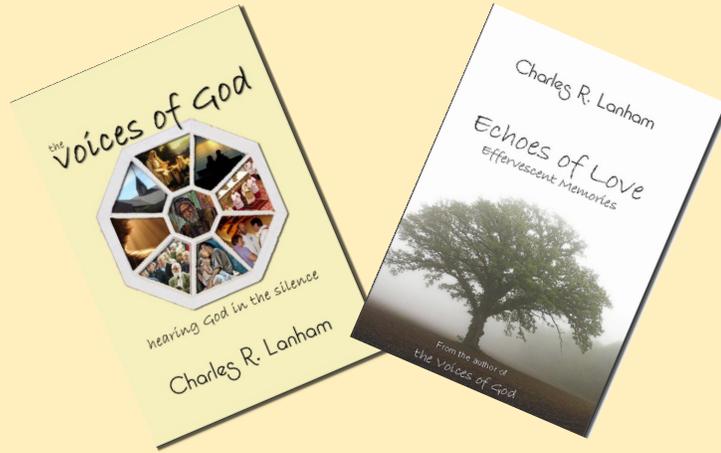
The corollary, of course, is this: a lie presumes a sin. Without first the sin, the lie holds no purchase. Its *raison d'être* is concealment, to hide the sin or more precisely, to avoid the shame and guilt associated with it.

Lying salves the conscience “*like a spoon full of sugar makes the medicine go down.*”⁴ Each lie soothes the soul, easing the way for the next—and the next—until the lie becomes one's truth and the sin one's reality.

Should one follow this then to its logical conclusion: a sin presumes a lie; a lie presumes a sin; relativism is a lie, therefore, relativism is a sin. It is a sin against the First Commandment.

—To be concluded next week—

1. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland: Chapter Three—The Caucus Race and a Long Tale*, 1865.
2. Most likely the most famous Pogo quotation, a cartoon drawn and written by Walt Kelly. It perfectly sums up his attitude toward the foibles of mankind and the nature of the human condition.
3. Apologies to William Shakespeare for paraphrasing his monologue from “As You Like It” spoken by the melancholy Jaques in Act II Scene VII: “*All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances.*”
4. Robert B. and Richard M. Sherman, from the movie *Mary Poppins, A Spoonful of Sugar*.



Books are available on **Amazon.com** or from the author's web site at:

deaconscorner.org

Deacon Chuck Lanham is an author, columnist, speaker, and a servant of God.

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