

Happy Monday to all,

On this date 27 years ago, October 6, 1998, Matthew Shepard, a gay University of Wyoming student, was brutally beaten, tortured, and left for dead near Laramie, Wyoming.

A significant part of my vocation is to help people connect their thoughts and emotions, on sometimes controversial issues, with the truths found in Catholic *Social Teaching*. These Monday Musings are researched, reflected upon and drafted to help folks to make the connection between real-life events and the social teachings of the Church. The focus is not on Catholic theology or morality... but rather how we should be applying our theological and moral beliefs to the social aspects of our lives.

My musings are built on scriptural references such as, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.” (John 8:7) ... “Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim? He answered, The one who treated him with mercy. Jesus said, Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:36-37)—and, of course, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Violence and acts of hate against people we personally find abhorrent, toxic and sinful are on the rise. Murders of persons due to their practices and beliefs are almost a daily occurrence as of late.

Catholic Social Teaching guidance related to homosexual persons was beautifully summarized in the words of Pope Francis, who said,

*“If a person is gay and seeks out the Lord and is willing, who am I to judge that person? I was paraphrasing by heart the Catechism of the Catholic Church where it says that these people should be treated with delicacy and not be marginalized. (CCC 2358)*

*I am glad that we are talking about 'homosexual people' because before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity, and people should not be defined only by their sexual tendencies: let us not forget that God loves all his creatures and we are destined to receive his infinite love.*

*I prefer that homosexuals come to confession, that they stay close to the Lord, and that we pray all together. You can advise them to pray, show goodwill, show them the way, and accompany them along it.*

*I will say this: mercy is real; it is the first attribute of God.”*

I am particularly inspired by the words—“before all else comes the individual person, in his wholeness and dignity”. Acknowledgment and respect for the wholeness and dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. It is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.

All programs and services provided by Catholic Charities of Stockton are based upon this foundational principle. When our clients come to us, requesting assistance, we do not ask if they are gay or straight, cohabitating or married in the Church, documented or undocumented, addicted, paroled, liberal or conservative, Catholic or not... these are not relevant in determining the options for how we can best serve their needs. We acknowledge that they are human persons, created in the image and likeness of God....with souls embedded with permanent human dignity...and we help them.

No one deserves to be brutalized and murdered due to the lifestyle they are living. No one deserves to be targeted, hated harmed or killed because of their political, religious, or social views. No one deserves to be judged, bullied, marginalized or harmed due to their physical, mental, behavioral, or developmental status.

In this dark period when humans are killing humans simply because of their beliefs and practices... on this day when we remember the murder of a 21 year old child of God, let us reflect on the words of Saint John of the Cross:

“In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.”

Blessings

Deacon Mike