

Children of God through Faith Proper 7C

As we heard from the children today, rules applied to toddlers won't work for older children. Rules change based on behavior and understanding. As children mature their understanding grows on what is good behavior and what could be dangerous to them. The same thing happens when we grow up in our belief in God. Rules give way to faith based on a relationship with Christ. Christians go from infancy to maturity when they do what is good no longer because they have to but because they want to.

The tension between law and faith throws up road blocks for those that would want to do good. MSNBC reported in an article this weekend (June 22, 2007) entitled, "Doctor's beliefs can hinder patient care." It reports that since 2005, 27 states introduced bills to widen refusal clauses. Four states are considering carte blanche refusal rights — much like the Mississippi law adopted in 2004, which allows any health care provider to refuse almost anything on moral grounds. The Washington, D.C., office of the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive-health research group notes that many refusal clauses do not require providers to warn women about restrictions on services or to refer them elsewhere. "You have to balance doctors' rights with their responsibilities to patients, employers and communities," he adds. "Doctors shouldn't be forced to provide services, but they can't just abandon patients."

The needs of the many versus the conscience of a few strains the backbone of what society has agreed is acceptable behavior. I can remember while a chaplain on active duty, having a young woman Marine come to me to discuss an abortion. We discussed all the options. She believed in God. She agonized about giving her baby up for adoption and how such an option gave her the sense of abandoning her child in giving it away or raising the child alone. Before she left my office I made it clear that I could not choose for her and that my own faith supported a pro-life conviction.

I told her I would not abandon her and would be there for her regardless of her decision. She returned a month later and said she had aborted. We discussed her feelings. I honestly kept my own to myself, though I felt sad. I did not know how to pray for her and don't remember doing so. I wished I had prayed with her. To myself, I asked God to be with her in the days ahead as she might face again such a decision. How might this experience lead her away or closer to God? I never would know since I did not see her again.

The apostle Paul writes, "Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed." Looking back in my relationship with that young woman the law certainly had imprisoned her. She needed to be set free to make her own decision about the life within her. And in hindsight the law had imprisoned me and my ministry to this gal. The law divided us but faith allowed me to see her as a child of God. The law informed me that life had been taken but that faith in Christ could overcome death and make this young lady an heir of the promise of life.

The paradox for me in all this is that that young woman and I were made to be one in Christ. In our gender differences, in our failing to understand the belief system we could not share at that time, Christ was and is the common ground of our being. His death tore down the walls between us. His life delivered the promise of putting on Christ over the body of death even the death of the unborn. The mystery I continue to put my faith in is how SAVING LIFE WILL LOSE IT AND LOSING LIFE WILL SAVE IT.

In Christ this is true. As his children our inheritance through baptism is certain. It became a sure thing for me not because I was born a child but because I was reborn in Christ. I easily forget that try as I may to save my own life; it slips through my hands just as my witness to that young Marine slipped through my grasp. By faith I had to entrust her into the hands of the one who gives life. I could not save her anymore than I could save that unborn child. By faith I had to believe she would be in good hands because the hands of Jesus Christ are big hands and strong to save.

Despite the odds being against the holy city of Jerusalem, the prophet Zechariah declared that the city would be in the good hands of God's army ready to make siege against all those who would come against its citizens. The spirit of compassion will be poured out on them. And the compassion of the LORD will open their eyes and they will "look on the one whom they have pierced, they will mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

Thanks be to God that he opens a fountain of faith for all who come. The fountain pours out compassion for the young and the old, for the Marine and her chaplain, the righteous and the unrighteous alike. May his cleansing purify and may we be found worthy of the one whose cross gave us life.

Eternal Father, Strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bid'st the mighty Ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep;
O hear us when we cry to thee,
for those in peril on land, in air and on the sea.

O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walked'st on the foaming deep,
and calm amidst its rage didst sleep;
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on land, in air and on the sea!

AMEN