

Hatred Can Be Transformed by Love

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I woke up this morning thinking about my world.

A person doesn't wake up one morning with a hatred of a person, a place, a political agenda, a race, a gender, or a religion that is so all-consuming that they feel compelled to do something about it. A person doesn't wake up one morning and decide to go out and kill a multitude of unsuspecting people. They don't wake up one morning and decide to kill a group of students, a gathering of concert goers, a nightclub full of people, or a religious congregation.

But sadly, that is exactly what they do.

This hatred of others began long before the final act of murder. As we discover more about the shooter (or bomber or knife-wielding person), we usually discover years, or even decades, of the indoctrination of hatred. This is the environment they are exposed to. This indoctrination is controlled by parents, families, peer groups (including bullies), religious leaders, and leaders of countries; most times on purpose, but sometimes as a result of the history or life experiences of those "teaching" the next generation.

This is a hatred presented and learned. Day after day, year after year, they learn by hearing and seeing those around them judging others with their own warped sense of superiority. Bad-mouthing others, protesting other's rights and freedoms, mud-slinging politicians, bullies who are allowed to continue to bully, and even our gossiping about others have a share in this learning to hate.

There are times when the mentally ill, or those we deem to "be a little off," are pushed to extreme behavior by those around them; but even then, there seems to be an undercurrent of hatred or misunderstanding. They have no safe place to release the ever-present thoughts of destruction in their minds, nor a place to be taken in and to be healed.

As these so-called senseless acts of violence continue, we as a people are learning to be initially shocked, outraged, and saddened, but then we go on with our lives until the next violent act.

As people of this world, as Christians, as Catholics, and as Franciscans, what should our response be?

We immediately pray for those affected and then we offer up thanksgiving to God that it was not in our state, or our neighborhood or our Church. We offer condolences on Facebook or through emails, prayers against the murderers and for those affected, but do we pray and work for a true change in our world?

New Zealand has given us another reason to pray. Fifty people were massacred, and another fifty were wounded, as they attended services at the Al Noor mosque and the Linwood Islamic Center. They were killed because of what they believed and where they worshiped. Hatred motivated the gunman and hatred reigned as they died.

I was in Pittsburgh when the Tree of Life Synagogue killings occurred. But this mass killing was in *my* home state, and it was in *my* daughters' neighborhood. It happened so close to home that my daughter, who works at Pittsburgh Children's Hospital, was notified to start emergency procedures because of a weapon in the area. A young man who was in my youth group, now a Pittsburgh S.W.A.T. officer, was called to the scene.

How did this hatred begin in these men? Hatred so deep and so engrossing that they thought they had no choice but to act upon their impulses. How were we as a country, a community, and a family co-responsible for this act of violence? What part do we "own" in this hatred? As Franciscans who profess that we "with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and as an image of Christ,"¹ we must take ownership and work together with all people to end these acts of violence. We must "seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony

¹ OFS Rule, Article #13.

though dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.”²

How many times in our lives do we hear disparaging or hateful discussions or gossiping? Do we kindly offer a way to end these discussions? Either by changing the subject, or bravely pointing out the need to steer away from these judgmental attitudes towards each other?

When we witness bullying, even in our own fraternities, do we stand up for the rights of others and offer alternative ways of stopping the bullying through dialogue or mediation? Do we let certain people always talk so much to the point of not hearing from the other smaller voices around us?

Do we allow others to use prejudicial words about other religions, peoples, or political views in our midst without challenging them to a change of heart, or at least to a change to openness and dialogue?

Do we need to reflect, contemplate and pray for *our* attitudes towards those around us, especially in our fraternities?

These shooters had years of learning hate that finally surfaced in these horrific acts of violence, as has happened with all participants in hate acts. We need to stop being unsuspecting teachers of hatred. We need to be teachers of love, teachers of acceptance of our brothers and sisters, teachers of forgiveness, and teachers of justice and peace. To only “tolerate” as the bumper sticker suggests is not enough. As Franciscans we are not called to tolerate, we are called to *love* today, tomorrow and forever.

To the people affected by violent acts around the world, I am so sorry for my part in the hatred.

Lord, Make Us Instruments of Your Peace

by Pope Francis

World Communications Day January 24, 2018

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Help us to recognize the evil concealed in a communication that does not build communion.

Help us to remove the venom from our judgements.

Help us to speak about others as our brothers and sisters.

You are faithful and trustworthy;
May our words be seeds of goodness for the world:

Where there is shouting,
let us practice listening;

Where there is confusion,
let us inspire harmony;

Where there is ambiguity,
let us bring clarity;

Where there is exclusion,
let us offer solidarity;

Where there is sensationalism,
let us bring sobriety;

Where there is superficiality,
let us raise real questions;

Where there is prejudice,
let us awaken trust;

Where there is hostility,
let us bring respect;

Where there is falsehood,
let us bring truth.

Amen

² OFS Rule, Article #19.