



Dear Friends,

Hordes storming the Capital this week felt like something out of Hollywood or Netflix. Surreal doesn't begin to describe the feeling I got seeing this huge multitude of people swarming the steps of the nation's Capital. But seeing them shatter a window and climb through like an invading army was too much. I was outraged, angry, saddened and scared all at the same time. I watched in horror.

Then I stepped back. The actions of those who stormed the Capital were wrong, true. But where did all that mob-anger come from? Practically everyone points to the President.

*They who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind.*” (Hosea 8:7) Historians and those who study crowd mentality tell us about the “big lie.” The “big lie” refers to demagogues who loudly and confidently lie to the crowd. They do this not once, but over and over again. Scholars note that since the speaker repeats this lie with conviction; folks will come to believe that person has got to be telling the truth. “Fake news” is just such lie. And once people believe the initial lie, they will believe anything else that person has to say.

This is the wolf in sheep's clothing. Sadly, many in our country who fear that their world view is being dismantled, become the flock willing to believe the wolf to be a sheep. Lying corrodes truth. And if corrosion is not stopped, it will expand. The fact that some members of Congress agreed with the big lie, only made matters worse. This situation has been fomenting for years.

What's underlying all this is the decision to push God out of the public square. Becoming a secular society sounds logical since there are so many different opinions of who God is and what God's about. Which “God” is the real God? Yahweh? Allah? Buddha? Krishna? Of course, there are agnostics and atheists in the mixture. How to come together for the common good seems to be the issue, but too many are interested in right than being helpful. Some, even in our own Church, think returning to the time before Vatican II is the answer. But the world has turned too many times for that to work.

Still, some song lyrics of the 60's can give us a clue. “All you need is love...” “Love is the answer...” both hit the nail on the head...so long as the definition of “love” is based in Scripture.

Biblical “love” is not “romantic love.” Biblical love has nothing to do with feelings or being attracted to someone. Biblical “love” can be defined as “commitment.” “God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son.” God acted; he *did* something; he committed himself. That's what the Bible calls love.

This weekend we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. The baptism preached by St. John was not the same as ours. His preaching called for the people to recommit themselves totally to the Lord God. Plunging into the water purified the persons, kind of like hitting the “reset” button. Jesus stepped into the Jordan river to totally commit himself to God. Unlike the others, when he came out of the river the Holy Spirit “drove” him into the seclusion of the desert to discover what God wanted of him. He emerged from that desert with a mission, something he had to do.

This feast calls us to follow the Lord. Most of us were baptized when we were infants but Confirmation reminded us the Holy Spirit waits to let us know what God wants of us as individuals and as Church. Jesus told us, “Go make disciples of all nations.” That’s our marching orders: that’s what the Father wants of us.

Bringing God back to the public square doesn’t mean trying to make everyone Catholic. It means “going about doing good” just like Jesus did. (Acts 10:38) He didn’t try to convert people to Judaism, he invited people to alter the way they treated each other and God. Just look at all the people fighting the hand to hand battle against the Covid virus in hospitals across the nation and around the world. They are risking their health and lives for others. Can’t we see God helping his people regardless of their religion? How about all who help feed the hungry and those who lost their jobs? Aren’t we moved by what they are doing?

Perhaps if we take the Lord’s lead seriously by committing ourselves to listen to the Spirit, we will have the impact on the world the Father is looking for. Christ charged to us to “love one another as I have loved you” which means to go about doing good. If we seek the guidance of the Spirit, if we allow the Spirit to “drive” us into a desert, perhaps we can live in such a way that folks may want to be part of our community. That can make a difference.

*Fr. Denis*