

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 11, 2018
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

Earlier this week, some people commented on a quote by Pope Francis. It's printed on page 58 of the missalette "Living with Christ": "Each of us has a vision of good and evil. We have to encourage people to move towards what they think is good. Everyone has their own idea of good and evil and must choose to follow the good and fight evil as one conceives them. That would be enough to make the world a better place." It troubled them because it seems to suggest relativism: that there is no absolute truth, but only opinion: "to each his own, live and let live." But relativism is not a mistake about what is true. It's a denial that the Good exists.¹ They were also concerned that the quote gives too much weight to individual conscience (VS 32), without pointing out that conscience must be formed. Pope Saint John Paul II says that we have "a call to form our conscience, to make it the object of continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good (VS 64). I proposed that they had to consider the context of the quote. It's not fair to take things out of context. It turns out that the quote was taken from an interview six months into his papacy, from an interview with an atheist reporter.² He wanted to share wisdom that could be received on common ground as a starting point: the philosophical truth that all

¹ Dr. Jeff Muris, Oct 4 2013, <https://www.catholicculture.org/commentary/otc.cfm?id=1116>

Lev 13:1-2, 45-46
Ps 32
1 Cor 10:31-11:1
Mk 1:40-45

men seek the good, even if get it wrong.³ Only God has a "complete and totally correct vision of the Good, [and it's] God's knowledge of Himself (Mirus)." We can only grasp it partially and therefore differently. Maybe that's why Jesus told the rich young man, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone (Mk 10:18, VS 9)." Our vision of the Good is enhanced by revelation and grace, sacraments and prayer - following "the way, and the truth, and the life" - but the vision is only unveiled fully in heaven. St. Paul said, "ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους", "*Nunc cognosco ex parte*", "Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood (1 Cor 13:12)." Pope Francis wanted to use language that the interviewer would accept, leading to his conversion in God's own time. Maybe he had the second reading in mind. "Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the Church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved." Because there is hope for those outside the Church. "For whatever goodness and truth is found in them is considered by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel, and bestowed by him who enlightens everyone, that they may in the end have life (LG 16, VS 3)."

² Eugenio Scalfari, La Repubblica, Oct 1 2013.

³ See Plato's Republic, VI, 505e.

All this is by way of introduction, so that you might agree that it's not fair to take things out of context. In the first reading, Moses receives a harsh law about lepers. "Anyone who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of their head be dishevelled, and shall cover their upper lip and cry out, 'Unclean, unclean'...being unclean such a one shall live alone with their dwelling outside the camp." Labelling and isolating those who were suffering seems cruel, but they were left alive; with the door open to hope and compassion. By contrast, abortion and euthanasia lock these doors and throw away the key. Jesus does heal the man with leprosy, but gives him a stern warning: "See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest." The mission of Jesus was to proclaim the good news, but now "Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country." One must not do evil even with good intention (VS 78, Rom 3:8). But God can turn evil into good (Rom 8:28). The next healing done by Jesus would be preceded by the forgiveness of his sins, given with the authority of God, and restoring body and soul. "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Only God knows the context of our actions, good and bad; and so he judges with mercy and love. Jesus asks the same of us (Lk 6:31-36).