

When is Fear Healthy?

Fr. Ronald Rolheiser OMI

Why don't we preach hellfire anymore? That's a question asked frequently by a lot of sincere religious people who worry that too many churches, priests, and ministers have gone soft on sin and are over-generous in speaking about God's mercy. The belief here is that more people would come to church and obey the commandments if we preached the raw truth about mortal sin, God's wrath, and the danger of going to hell when we die. The truth will set you free, these folks assert, and the truth is that there is real sin and there can be real and eternal consequences for sin. The gate to heaven is narrow and the road to hell is wide. So why aren't we preaching more about the dangers of hellfire?

What's valid in this kind of reasoning is that preaching about mortal sin and hellfire can be effective. Threats work. I know. I grew up subjected to this kind of preaching and admit that it affected my behaviour. But that effect was ambivalent: On the one side, it left me scared enough before God and life itself to fear ever straying very far morally or religiously. On the other side, it also left me religiously and emotionally crippled in some deep ways. Simply stated, it's hard to be intimate friends with a God who frightens you and it's not good religiously or otherwise to be overly timid and afraid before life's sacred energies. Fear of divine punishment and fear of hellfire, admittedly, can be effective as a motivator.

So why not preach fear? Because it's wrong, pure and simple. Brainwashing and physical intimidation are also effective, but they are antithetical to love. You don't enter a love relationship because you feel afraid or threatened. You enter a love relationship because you feel drawn there by love.

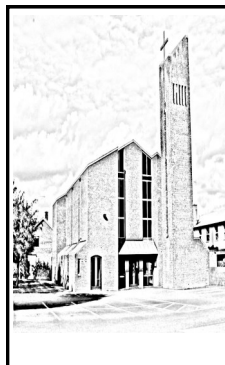
More importantly, preaching divine threat dishonours the God in whom we believe. The God who Jesus incarnates and reveals is not a God who puts sincere, good-hearted people into hell against their will on the basis of some human or moral lapse which in our religious categories we deem to be a mortal sin. For example, I still hear this threat being preached in our churches: *If you miss going to church on Sunday it's a mortal sin and should you die without confessing it, you will go to hell.*

What kind of God would underwrite this kind of a belief? What kind of God would not give sincere people a second chance, a third one, and seventy-seven times seven more chances if they remain sincere? What kind of God would say to a repentant person in hell: "Sorry, but you knew the rules! You're repentant now, but it's too late. You had your chance!"

A healthy theology of God demands that we stop teaching that hell can be a nasty surprise waiting for an essentially good person. The God we believe in as Christians is infinite understanding, infinite compassion, and infinite forgiveness. God's love surpasses our own and if we, in our better moments, can see the goodness of a human heart despite its lapses and weaknesses, how much more so will God see this. We have nothing to fear from God. Or have we? Doesn't scripture tell us that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*? How does that square with not being afraid of God? There are different kinds of fear, some healthy and some not. When scripture tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, the kind fear it is talking about is not contingent upon feeling threatened or feeling anxious about being punished. That's the kind of fear we feel before tyrants and bullies. There is however a healthy fear that's innate within the dynamics of love itself. This kind of fear is essentially proper reverence, that is, when we genuinely love someone we will fear betraying that love, fear being selfish, fear being boorish, and fear being disrespectful in that relationship. We will fear violating the sacred space within which intimacy occurs. Metaphorically we will sense we are standing on holy ground and that we'd best have our shoes off before that sacred fire.

Moreover, scripture tells us that when God appears in our lives, almost always, the first words we will hear are: "Don't be afraid!" That's because God is not a judgmental tyrant but a loving, creative, joy-filled energy and person. As Leon Bloy reminds us, *joy is the most infallible indication of God's presence*. The famous psychiatrist, Fritz Perls, was once asked by a young fundamentalist: "Have you been saved?" His answer: "Saved? I'm still trying to figure out how to be spent!" We honour God not by living in fear lest we offend him, but in reverently spending the wonderful energy that God gives us. God is not a law to be obeyed, but a joyous energy within which to spend ourselves generatively.

Pob Bendith. God bless you&Keep you. Fr Pius CMI



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29th September 2024 26th Sunday Ordinary Time B

LITURGY OF THE WEEK: Psalter Week II

Mass times: Mon:10am Tue:7pm,Wed-Friday 10am. Sat.5.30pm. Sun.11am

Live Streaming Link:

<https://www.churchservices.tv/mold>

28th September Saturday 5.30pm
Bernard Kelly RIP (*The Greaney Family*)

29th September Sunday 11am
Thanksgiving:Ruby Wedding Sue&Steve Sidlow
(*Helen Sidlow*)
Stephen Hayhurst RIP (*Barbara Hayhurst*)

Monday 30th Sep	Mem. St. Jerome Int. Anne Hayward (<i>Sr. Mary O'Callaghan</i>)
Tuesday 1st Oct	Mem. St. Therese of Child Jesus 7pm Int. Sr. Sophie Bastiam (<i>HF Rockferry</i>)
Wednesday 2nd Oct	Mem. The Holy Guardian Angels Int. Teresa Carberry (<i>Peter Carberry</i>)
Thursday 3rd Oct	Liturgy of the day Jim Brown RIP (<i>Carmel Brown</i>)
Friday 4th Oct	Mem. St. Francis of Assisi Int. Maureen and Rolland Allman (<i>Michael Cresswell</i>) Eucharistic Adoration today till 11am

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time B

5th October Saturday 5.30pm
For People of the Parish

6th October Sunday 11am
Jim Brown RIP
(*Carmel Brown*)

Confessions
On Saturdays
and Sundays
before the
Mass
(Saturdays
5pm to 5.20
and Sundays
10.30am to
10.50).
Weekdays
after the Mass,
on Request.



ONE OF US?

Martha Lewis was distressed when her house was burgled. It wasn't so much that she had lost her pension money and some jewellery that her late husband had given her. It was more a sense of outrage that someone had invaded her privacy, gone through her things and interfered where they had no right to be. She was only grateful that she had been out at bingo at the time. It could have been worse.

So when the local police phoned to say that some of the items had been recovered, she walked to the police station with a spring in her step. She'd only been inside the place on a couple of occasions and laughed to herself what people would think if they saw her coming out!

It was a hive of activity inside. The desk sergeant was processing a group of people who had had too much to drink and started a

fight. There was a woman sitting with car documents who had been called to produce them after some minor traffic infringement. And there was a shabbily dressed youth who was clearly on drugs.

As she looked at the young man Martha



sniffed. Those dreadlocks couldn't possibly be healthy and he probably hadn't washed them in a month. Why he needed to have so many rings piercing every possible extremity was a mystery to her. She was annoyed by the swishing bass sound that

came from the ear-phones of his personal stereo and wondered why he hadn't even bothered to tie the laces of his trainers. Anyway, thank God her grandchildren had steered clear of drugs. She'd been very strict with Violet, her daughter, and it had paid dividends with the way she was now bringing up her own children.

The policewoman took her to a room where Martha confirmed that the recovered property was indeed hers. She thanked the officer but the officer told her not to thank her but Mr Williams who had found them. "There he is," she said, "with the dreadlocks and the stereo."

Jesus said, "Anyone who is not against us is for us."



QR Code for Today's Readings.

News, Notices and Events

Lifts to weekend masses - help urgently needed

Any able-bodied parishioners with their own cars who might be willing to offer lifts to and from church on Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings for parishioners with limited mobility, please get in touch with a member of SVP. We hope to compile a list of volunteers so that lifts can be provided when needed. Names of SVP members are displayed on a noticeboard in the church porch.

Many thanks for your help!

Chris Walsh and Mary McCarry

CAFOD HARVEST FAST DAY APPEAL

Harvest Fast Day this year is Friday 4th October, the feast of St Francis. By giving to Fast Day people like Daniel, a young man in Democratic Republic of Congo, who is carving a better future for his family with carpentry skills he learned in a Cafod-funded training centre.

Giving to Cafod this Harvest you will help fund training, tools, equipment and safe places, so more people like Daniel can learn new skills and fulfil their God-given potential. Envelopes will be given out this weekend and collected after Masses next weekend 5th & 6th October. Thank you for ongoing support for Cafod.

Joyce Elcock

St Francis de Sales said that the test of a prophet or good preacher is that people go away not saying "Oh, what a lovely sermon" but "I will do something". Anyone who can get us to act upon our faith is a prophet of God. **Philomena Danson**

Mr. Bernard Kelly RIP

Bernard Kelly has gone home to the Lord. Our sympathies and prayers to his wife Rosalie and to their children Brendan, Maria, Liam, Michael, John Paul and to their grandchildren and to their family and friends at this time of shock and the pain of loss.

Requiem Mass for Bernard will take place here on **7th October Monday at 10am.**

May Bernard rest in peace and rise in glory

PREPARATION FOR THE NEW LECTIONARY

In the weeks leading up to the introduction of the new Lectionary on the 1st Sunday of Advent there will be a number of preparation days for those who exercise the ministry of Reader of the Word. The study days will take place across the Diocese and it is expected that all who wish to continue the ministry will attend one of the days.

Dates for your diary:

Saturday 26th October: Mold Led by Dcn John Goggin

More details will follow in due course.

We are blessed with our Ministers of the Word here at St David's, if any parishioners would like to take the opportunity to become a Minister of the Word and joint the rota for either Saturday or Sunday (or both) please contact Dcn John or Fr Pius. **Dcn John**

We remember in our prayer

Those whose anniversaries occur this week

(Sept 28th) Peter Stevens, Bridget Burns, Michael Vincent Richards, William Parker, Margaret Williams **(29th)** Thomas Albert Cresswell **(30th)** Mary Griffiths, Mary Clavin, Catherine McAvaghan, Matthew O'Brien, Ann Gavaghan, Margaret Helen O'Brien, Bea Coupe, **(1st Oct)** Bridget Gallagher **(2nd)** Nellie Tizzard **(3rd)** Catherine Wilson, Wilfrid Lydiat, James Brown **(4th)** Ann Dalton, Matthew Maugher, Christopher Douglas Ogden, Robert Francis Danson, Graham Cox, James Geary, John Cresswell