

Tolerance vs. Love

Dear brothers and sisters,

In May of 2013, Bishop Robert Barron wrote an article titled *Sympathy for the Devil*, in it he suggests a problem with the idea of “tolerance” which is prominent today. He describes a homily, given by Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of the Episcopal Church, where she suggests that when St. Paul exorcises a young girl of the demon inside her, he is “depriving her of her gift of spiritual awareness.” Bp. Jefferts Schori says that Paul refuses to recognize something as being beautiful even though it is different. Barron notes that it has always been held in the Christian community that being possessed by a demon is a bad thing, which seems fairly obvious. He concludes by saying that the root of the problem is “conflation of early twenty-first century values of inclusion and toleration with the great Biblical value of love. To love is to will the good of the other as other.” I would suggest that this idea of love is what is at the heart of the Gospel message.

The idea behind tolerance has its place, however, as Bp. Barron points out it should not be confused as the ultimate message of Jesus. What Jesus clearly tells us is to “love one another; even as I have loved you” (Jn 13:34). How did Jesus love us? By offering Himself on the Cross. This is not the idea of tolerance. Christ came so that we would no longer have to be slaves to sin, and tolerance more often than not can be translated as “tolerance of sin.”

Tolerance ultimately makes a statement comparable to “you do what you want, and I will do what I want.” This is not a statement of love. It would not be loving for a parent to let their child walk out into a busy street where they could come to harm, and yet this is comparable to what the “virtue” of tolerance allows. While no one would claim that tolerance would apply to the example above, they often claim that it would apply to people’s life choices such as their family matters, lifestyle, or what they teach others as being “okay for them” (like abortion, or unchaste relationships). We can easily think that sin is real for everyone else, but not for the ones that we love. Partially, I feel that this has to do with the fact that we do not believe in anyone being sent to Hell, and partially because we do not want to see the error of those we love. I know that I do this! We need to hold on to the truth, that sin is real. It is a danger, and everyone falls into it. It does not make them evil, but it can lead to evil acts. For instance, we will often want to water down the faith regarding such things as the kingship of Jesus Christ, or the truths about marriage and the family, by not confronting those that we love. I would suggest that the answer to this problem lies in acceptance of the greatest of all virtues: love.

Love, unlike tolerance, says, “I will go to the limits for you. I will profess the truth, walk with you, and show you my deep love for you and your dignity as a child of God; regardless of your sins or how you identify as a person, by showing you the way to ultimate happiness.” Love presents to people the truth that sin is real, but so is mercy. That the Father loves them and wants them to live in ultimate happiness with Him. St. Paul says this weekend in his letter to the Romans, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rm 8:18). The glory that he is speaking about is the ultimate joy of eternal union with God. I would suggest that some of the “suffering” can be embodied by the discomfort that we will feel when standing up for the truths of the Faith. We are trying to get others to the joy of Heaven, not to the mere comfort of this present life.

This does not mean that we are to go about our day, forcefully telling others that they have to accept the Catholic faith; this is not the message of Jesus. Jesus wants all people to find ultimate union with Him, and this has to be freely chosen. Some take this idea of the necessity of free choice to a ridiculous degree, and do not show others the Faith at all. We should rather show others that Jesus is the way to true life by the way we live and act. This sometimes requires being considered to be fools by those closest to us.

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