

Culture Wars

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

October 5, 2025

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One the the wars going on in our world today that is just as prevalent but not as obvious as war in the traditional sense is what we call 'culture wars.' 'Culture wars' are the many ways we fight with people over the controversial issues in our societies today. We call them 'wars' because these issues all too readily take on a combative spirit and use hurtful words, grudges, name calling, and disrespect like weapons. If we are honest, many of us are caught up in these culture wars today.

Our scripture readings this weekend teach us how to make it through challenging times without losing our integrity. In our first reading from Habakkuk, the prophet was getting so upset by all the violence, ruin, destruction, strife, and discord of his day that God had to remind him that the vision still had its time. If it was delayed, God said to wait for it. It would not disappoint. In our second reading from Second Timothy, Paul told Christians to bear their share of hardship for the Gospel with the strength that comes from God. Whenever our human patience is tested, we need to ask for God's help. Finally, in our Gospel, Jesus instructed his followers that they were servants, not masters. Living as servants demanded that they approach life with humility and simplicity. They were to

be as small as mustard seeds. If they could do that, their faith could uproot trees and replant them in the sea. All these readings sketch a better path forward in the midst of challenges.

To be clear, as Christians we do have an obligation to get involved in the many controversial issues and problems in our world today. Many of them need our action, advocacy, and awareness. This is especially true around the issues that threaten human dignity, as October is Respect Life month. At the same time, we must resist the temptation to become militant in our positions on issues or even worse, militant in our relationships. Whenever we do this, in the words of the psalm this weekend, we harden our hearts. Life becomes a constant battle in which we need to win and others need to lose. In the fighting, all of us end up losing our integrity.

Howard Zehr, the educator and practitioner of Restorative Justice, insightfully identified ten key principles for living, especially for living in challenging times. One of the ten is the following: "listen deeply and compassionately to others, seeking to understand even if you don't agree with them. Think about who you want to be in the latter situation rather than just being right." Zehr's great insight is that anytime we find ourselves getting involved in a culture war, which will most certainly happen, we should ask ourselves what kind of person we want to be after the issue is over. Even if the issue isn't going away anytime soon, it is still worth

asking the question hypothetically. I think one of the greatest compliments we could receive after an issue is over would be that we were compassionate and good listeners the whole time. In fact, it will most likely be those who are compassionate and good listeners who will end the culture wars and find solutions moving forward. 'The rash one has no integrity; the just one shall live.'

Christians should avoid culture wars by not getting so caught up in the present situations that we lose our integrity or forget the way forward.

Whenever we get caught up in arguments or controversial issues, do we keep our integrity? Do we know where the line is between advocacy and violence?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for God's vision for our human family, a vision which does not ignore our current issues, but at the same time is much broader than our problems and desires the salvation of all. The next time we find ourselves getting caught up in a culture war, let us think about not only what side of the issue we need to be on, but also about what kind of person we want to be on the other side of the issue altogether.