

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 19 & 20, 2017 – Reflection

“Thus says the Lord: Observe what is right, do what is just.”

(Isaiah 56:1)

“Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” Those cutting words, delivered on national television, effectively ended the career of Senator Joe McCarthy. For four years, McCarthy had enjoyed a kind of immunity as he smeared anyone he pleased while on a national witch hunt for Communist sympathizers. But in the spring of 1954, during hearings on supposed infiltrators to the U.S. Army that were broadcast on the new medium of television, McCarthy casually sought to destroy a young lawyer at the firm of Joseph Welch, counsel to the Army, an esteemed Harvard-trained lawyer and fellow Republican. When McCarthy suggested the junior attorney had Communist sympathies, the courtly Welch sank his head in despair, then looked McCarthy in the eye and excoriated him with those immortal words: “Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness.” When McCarthy tried to continue his attack, Welch angrily interrupted, “Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” Tens of millions of new American TV viewers watched in fascination and horror. Overnight, McCarthy’s immense national popularity evaporated. Censured by his Senate colleagues, ostracized

by his party, and ignored by the press, McCarthy died three years later, 48 years old and a broken man.

(Karabell/Politico/8-1-16)

More and more today, even ordinary people claim not to know what sin is; that freedom allows me to think and speak and act as I will, provided I'm hurting no one.

If that's true, why have white supremacists worn hoods as they carry their torches and spew their venom ... why hide the face behind the philosophy?

If that's true, why do men close the doors to computer rooms as they surf web-sites in the night, as wives and kids sleep in other rooms? Why hide innocent intellectual curiosity?

If that's true, why would folk carrying on an extra-marital affair rendezvous under assumed names at some fleabag motel? Why hide a beautiful love?

The truth is, protest though they might, people, especially the guilty, do have a sense of sin, and all the bluster, all the excuses, all the other-blaming can't change the fact that what's dirty is dirty; what's warped is warped; what's nasty is nasty; what's hateful is hateful; and what's evil is evil.

On Mt. Sinai, God gave to His people, to the world, Ten Commandments ... not suggestions, not optional guidelines ... commands to govern our behavior as we go through life. What did God tell us? Honor God first and before anything, anyone else. Watch your mouth. Go to church to start your week before you start anything else. Treat people with the

same respect you'd like to be treated with. Don't kill: not the body, not the soul, not a reputation. Your body's holy, don't trash it; don't give it away cheaply. Keep your hands off what's not yours. Tell the truth ... not what you want people to think is the truth ... just THE truth. And don't always be looking for a better offer, a greener pasture, a bigger trophy, more stuff ... instead, be grateful, share, be generous.

When it comes to right and wrong, virtue and sin, sometimes things are complicated, but most often, it's pretty simple and when you make a mess of things, as we all do, it's time to fess-up, make amends, eat some humble pie, kneel before the Almighty and beg forgiveness and then, change your act.

"Thus says the Lord: Observe what is right, do what is just."