

Pastor's Column

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"Go Up The River And Beyond The Bend"

This parable is taken from Fr. Ronald Rolheiser's book, "The Holy Longing—The Search for a Christian Spirituality":

"Once upon a time there was a town that was built just beyond the bend of a large river. One day some of the children from the town were playing beside the river when they noticed three bodies floating in the water. They ran for help and the townsfolk quickly pulled the bodies out of the river.

One body was dead so they buried it. One was alive, but quite ill, so they put that person into the hospital. The third turned out to be a healthy child, who they then placed with a family who cared for it and who took it to school.

From that day on, every day a number of bodies came floating down the river and, every day, the good people of the town would pull them out and tend to them—taking the sick to hospitals, placing the children with families, and burying those who were dead.

This went on for years; each day brought its quota of bodies, and the townsfolk not only came to expect a number of bodies each day but also worked at developing more elaborate systems for picking them out of the river and tending to them. Some of the townsfolk became quite generous in tending to these bodies and a few extraordinary ones even gave up their jobs so that they could tend to this concern full-time. And the town itself felt a certain healthy pride in its generosity.

However, during all these years and despite all that generosity and effort, nobody thought to go up the river, beyond the bend that hid from their sight what was above them, and find out why, daily, those bodies came floating down the river."

This parable says to me, "Get to the root causes. Don't just treat the symptoms."

So often, though, we are afraid to get to the root of things, because, subconsciously, we know that to do so will mean a change in our own attitudes, gestures, and behavior.

Finding the real solution more often than not means not only a change in the "opponent" but it also entails the need for a change in the one seeking the solution.

There is an old Jewish proverb that says, "Listen to your enemies. God is speaking."

Whether it is a marital conflict, a family difficulty, community relationships, or even national policies from immigration to health care to the War in Iraq, if we want to deal with more than the symptoms and get to the root cause of things, we must have the courage to listen to our critic, our opponent, and, yes, even our enemy. In their criticism, in their stridency, or even in their hateful words and actions, there is a message waiting for us to hear and a lesson to be learned. "Listen to your enemies, God is speaking."

Whatever controversy or difficulty we are facing, be it at home, at work, in the local, national, or international community, let us have the courage to move beyond treating the symptoms. Let us be willing to go up the river, and beyond the bend!

Fr. Mike