



Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Pastor's Column

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Walking in the Shoes of a Muslim...Think about It!

Several months ago Imam Taha Hassane came to St. Thomas More along with the Almustafa's, the Syrian refugee family that our Parish is sponsoring. They attended the 10:30am Mass and Imam Taha spoke to the assembly at that Mass.

After this event, I received an email from one of our Parishioners, Francis Rushford, whom I feel has captured the essence of the "Islamic Situation" today.

He very succinctly talks about what Muslims need to do and what we "Established Americans" need to do.

Please take time to read his email and my response.

Dear Fr. Mike,

I think what you are doing to bridge the gap with the Muslim Community in San Diego is a great thing. I have spent many years since the 9/11 attacks reading and trying to understand the terrorists and the religion they use. We have a clash of civilizations and we need to try and bridge that gap. That term makes people uneasy, but it is a clash of culture, religion and even language. There is no separation of Church and state; Islam is a way of life. Our pluralistic secular society is in many ways anathema to the civilization we are trying to bridge. If we ignore our differences, we will overly rely on similarities that are not really the same.

I am one of 357 people that survived at Cantor Fitzgerald at the World Trade Center, where 712 of my work colleagues were killed on 9/11. I have spent years reading all that I could get my hands on to try and understand the motivation. I have read all of the holy books of Islam. I have various historical books on Islam and the Middle East, and it is clear that we in the West have to recognize that we have different cultures, religions, politics, and way of life that those people that are Muslim and live in the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

Too many people looked at the title of the book, *Clash of Civilizations* and decided by its title it was calling for war and it is quite the opposite. We need to find a way to peace and we need to stop the recruitment of terrorists and we can only do that by starting to build bridges.

It will have to be the Muslims themselves that end this sectarian violence in a similar manner. We can be supportive and work to understand how we can help, but what we cannot do is to expect wholesale adoption of our civilization and its values. We have to respect that there will be great differences, but that we have to strive for peace and understanding and at times that will cause great discomfort for peoples on both sides of the divide. We cannot make excuses for terrorists when they act and we must not blame ourselves as part of any solution.

This is not about the Crusades that the Muslims won. This is about the belief that extremism will eventually get the fanatics what they want and we need to be strong in the face of such extremism.

I do not think that many of my fellow parishioners understand the courage it has taken for these people to come to our Church and stand with us and what it means. It means they are showing great courage because many of the fanatics will see their actions as those of apostates and that they should be harmed.

This is a long road and it will take many years, and I am not sure that in our life- times we will get there, but there has to be a start. I commend you for your work.

Here is my response to Francis Rushford

Dear Francis,

Thank you so much for your kind and very insightful e-mail. You have touched the very heart of the problem as well as the way to begin to find solutions.

I agree that this will take more than our life-times, and I agree that the members of the Islamic Community are the ones who need to stand and be counted, and work for ways in which Muslims can live in America without feeling that they are abandoning their faith.

Imam Taha often uses this line "I am just an immigrant who has fallen in love with America."

I truly believe that the vast majority of Muslims who come to the United States want what is offered here in the USA. They appreciate the freedoms, and the quality of life that can be had.

Muslim Scholars of the Koran are working diligently to bring new interpretations and understandings of how to still be faithful to the teachings of the Koran and to live in the United States without feeling that they are being disloyal to their faith.

In my mind, it is very similar to many Catholics who left predominantly Catholic Countries in which Church and State were very "tied together." Coming to the USA, they found a very secular country with a separation of Church and State, and they struggled as to how they could live together and still be faithful to their religion.

Christian (including Catholic) Scripture Scholars had to, and do continue, to revisit the Scriptures and to look at them differently in light of the American experience. This continues to this day.

The Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran do not change, but how we understand their messages in light of our present realities does change.

Catholics are further along in this process. Muslims are just beginning. Our "job" is to support the Muslim Community in their efforts to make this transition.

We are all immigrants who have fallen in love with America!

Thank you Francis!