

Good Friday

Spirit of Easter demands compassion, forgiveness, ability to see goodness



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Today is Friday. Good Friday. Christians worldwide and Catholics like myself will worship Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We will go to church today to reaffirm our faith in the Son of God, who was crucified and died for the salvation of mankind.

Sunday, we will go to church again, to celebrate his resurrection and ascension into heaven.

Sometimes we as Christians forget that Christ died for us. He died so that our sins may be forgiven.

But maybe some people think that absolution of sin is an automatic — just because Christ died for our sins, with the understanding that we're all sinners, sinning is therefore normal and to be expected.

Maybe people think that man is predisposed to give into temptation and to be the collective sinner that Christ died for, and therefore no one needs to be concerned about leading a life of sin, because forgiveness occurred almost 2,000 years ago. (I know some will dispute the date —

but that's okay; it's not my point.)

I have to admit that I've leaned toward believing in the proposition that man is predisposed to sin. I've occasionally been known to subscribe to the Hobbesian view of human nature — that life is "nasty, brutish and short" and that people are fundamentally bad. John Locke, another political philosopher of Hobbes' time, suggested that the opposite was true — that people were fundamentally good.

My life experiences have made me more prone to adopt Hobbes' view of human nature.

Working 13 years in the prison system certainly affects the way one views his or her fellow human beings. Being suspicious and distrusting goes with the job and spills over into the private lives of those charged with the care and custody of society's rejects.

I've been out of the system for a while now, but remnants of those thought processes tend to stay with me. I consciously work to overcome the mind-set, but it's often difficult. Take the other night, for example.

I went to my friend Tom's house in Omaha. When I got there, I saw his wife, Karen, sitting on the front steps, looking up the street.

Up the street a little way stood my friend Tom, on the grass between the sidewalk and the curb. A young, small, frail-looking woman sat in a wheelchair on the sidewalk, and a large young man with his back to me stood over her, yelling at her.

Another man was angrily confronting the man yelling at the woman in the wheelchair, who was screaming at the large young man.

I got out of my car and walked up to where Karen was sitting, and asked her what was going on. She said that they had heard screaming, and when they came out, the woman asked them to call the police, which she did.

After a few minutes of watching and listening as the man confronting the younger man continued to tell the young man to get away from the woman, which the young man refused to do, I decided to remove my watch and glasses and walk up behind the young man, to offer physical assistance, if needed (removing things like that is standard operating procedure in the prison environment before going into a potentially volatile situation; old habits die hard).

When I got to within four or five feet of the young man, the man confronting him told him to take his hands off the woman's wheelchair and again, the younger man refused, opting instead to keep yelling at the woman in the wheelchair about how he was going to jail because of her.

The man confronting him, perhaps a little emboldened by the presence of a third person to render assistance, decided enough was enough and grabbed the young man.

In an effort to reduce injuries to all involved, I grabbed the young man's left hand, applied a pain compliance grip I used to teach to correc-

tional officers, took the young man to the ground and held him there until the police arrived.

I didn't release my grip until they had cuffs on him.

As it turned out, this monster of a young man had violently assaulted the frail young woman in the wheelchair, practically right in front of my friend's house.

And apparent to me from listening to the two of them during the 10- or 15-minute ordeal was that the two of them appeared to be lovers involved in a domestic dispute. And both of them seemed to suffer from some kind of diminished mental functioning — perhaps borderline mental retardation.

Well, the cops took the guy away and pushed the woman up the street to where she lived.

And that was that.

Well, not exactly.

The whole thing has kind of lingered with me this week.

It's made me think about human nature again, in ways I haven't thought about it in quite some time.

I think the guy who assaulted the woman is probably basically a good person. When the cops got there, he immediately admitted to having assaulted the woman, said he was sorry, and told the woman (for about the hundredth time) that he loved her.

So why do I think this loser is probably fundamentally good?

Perhaps he really does suffer from some sort of diminished mental capacity. Maybe because of that, his

impulse control is poor.

Do diminished mental capacity and poor impulse control make someone a bad person?

Does it make him predisposed to sin?

Or is this an example of mankind in its most base state?

I don't know anymore.

But I'd like to believe that the young man is a basically good person.

I'd like to be able to understand him — and perhaps more important — to have forgiveness in my heart for him.

That's terribly hard to do when you see a big guy like him wailing on a poor, helpless, defenseless woman in a wheelchair.

But then I think about Easter week, and what it means (or should mean) to me as a Catholic and a Christian.

Christ died on the cross to save a sinner like me (and that young man) from eternal damnation, because we're all supposedly predisposed to be sinners.

Because God's forgiveness knows no limits.

In evaluating what happened in the context of the week in which it happened, I could come to only one conclusion.

If resisting temptation and avoiding sinful behavior is the goal of a good Christian existence, then perhaps the ability to forgive one another is the zenith of that existence.

Christ died so that our sins may be forgiven. The least we can do is have the ability to forgive.

Play nice

U.S. government should resort to childish antics to quell Serbian insubordination



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So, the Serbs and Kosovars can't get along, eh?

NATO (read: America) is dropping bomb after bomb ... this is how they try to stop the fighting. Every day I hear cries of "It won't work!" And those cries are probably right.

I'm still undecided as to whether or not the United States should be trying so hard to influence the rest of the world.

Some say it's being a bully, and all the littler kids will gang up and knock its block off, sooner or later. Others say that, since we have the most ability — the most money and the strongest military — it is our duty to police the rest of the world.

I haven't decided which side of that fence is better, yet.

But as long as the United States is throwing its weight around, why doesn't it try a different tactic than simple military action, which history has shown to be an imperfect and permanent solution?

Let's take a page from the books of elementary school. Politicians are really just big, fat, gray-haired kids, anyway.

What's the first threat a teacher uses when kids at neighboring desks won't behave? Separate them, of course.

I say we take that little bugger Slobodan (Milosevic, Serbian dictator), along with his nasty little comrades, and relocate them all to the middle of Chile (or some other

strange, out-of-the-way location.) That way, there won't be any more spit wads being thrown.

And if the Serb militants had to figure out how to find food and fend off those crotchety Andean mountain goats, they'd be way too preoccupied to want to fight anybody.

I think the "move 'em to the other side of the classroom" method of peacekeeping could have widespread applications.

We all know that trouble is everyone's middle name in the Middle East, right? Just take the Iraqis, the Iranians and any of their neighbors who won't keep their mouths shut and drop them in different corners of the globe. Reserve the South Pole for Saddam.

I think you'll be pleased at how quietly the classroom seems to work after that.

Here's another option we can take from grammar school: make fun.

Military propaganda is one thing, but has a country ever tried just out-and-out, sixth-grade style ridicule of an enemy?

Pay some of the Serb leader's inner circle to pull his pants down every once in awhile. We might not be able to convince any of them to assassinate Slobodan, but anyone will commit a good ol' de-pantsing, if pushed a little.

And when all the little Serb girlies point and laugh at Slobodan's underwear ... oh boy. He'll be so embarrassed, he'll run and hide! (Well, he'll try to. But that's the beauty of pulling down someone's pants.)

Along those lines — snuggies, swirlies, horse-bites and towel-snappings are also choice options.

Remember how fun it was to pick the nastiest, oldest teacher in school and then say that

one of the boys liked her? Do the same to Slobodan.

Let's see, who's the oldest, nastiest authority figure ... oh yeah, Madeleine Albright. Just tell everyone that Slobodan tried to kiss Madeleine Albright in the hallway, and that he rides his bike past her house every day.

(You'd almost feel sorry for the poor bastard who got that treatment, wouldn't you?)

How would we pass the word, you ask? Simple: the Internet. Finally, we'd get something more fun out of it than just pornography. We could also post a drawing or two — preferably a stick-figure Serb leader eating poop or crying like a baby.

Here's something I always dreaded as a kid: when some of your most annoying classmates come over and just won't go home.

Rather than

invading Yugoslavia, why don't Bill Clinton and his cabinet invite themselves over, then play Slobodan's Nintendo 64 and eat all the popsicles he was saving for himself? And while they're at it, they should get his control paddles all sticky. That's the worst.

Oh, and let's not forget the little kid standby, incorporating someone's name into offensive, childish poems.

Slobodan Milosevic, eatin' beetles in the ditch! Slobodan, Slobodan, got some girl's undies on!

Of course, that would eventually devolve into just calling him by the humorously wrong name all the time.

Hi, Slobbergong! What's for lunch? Slowmoschlong, time for recess!

Teacher, Slurpalong is talking in class!

It helps if you can get girls involved in this name-calling. There's nothing more annoying than the shrillness of a little girl's voice, repeating something over and over.

TNT may not bring the Serbs to tears, but that will.

Yep. There's my advice for U.S. administrators. Forget playing the military heavy, and just deal with things like we did when we were kids.

Those kind of things made me hate my childhood. I can only suppose that they would make life an intolerable hell for Slobodan Milosevic, as well.

He'd either run home and cry in his mommy's lap or permanently roll up into the fetal position.

Problem solved.



MATT HANEY/DN