

Column081119
Companions on the Journey

August 11, 2019

Dear Friends,

Last weekend there were two more mass killings in our country. Twenty years ago our Archbishop, Charles Chaput, as then Archbishop of Denver saw firsthand the Columbine mass killings. He wrote on all of this then and again now.

By Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap. • Posted August 5, 2019

“Exactly 20 years ago, in U.S. Senate testimony just weeks after the Columbine High School massacre, I offered these thoughts:

The real problem [of Columbine-like violence in our culture] is in here, in us ... In the last four decades we've created a culture that markets violence in dozens of different ways, seven days a week. It's part of our social fabric. When we build our advertising campaigns on consumer selfishness and greed, and when money becomes the universal measure of value, how can we be surprised when our sense of community erodes? When we glorify and multiply guns, why are we shocked when kids use them?

When we answer murder with more violence in the death penalty, we put the state's seal of approval on revenge. When the most dangerous place in the country is a mother's womb and the unborn child can have his or her head crushed in an abortion, even in the process of being born, the body language of that message is that life isn't sacred and may not be worth much at all. In fact, certain kinds of killing no longer even count officially as "killing." Certain kinds of killing we enshrine as rights and protect by law. When we live this kind of contradiction, why are we surprised at the results?

The Columbine murders will mark my [Denver] community for years to come. They're a wound felt by the entire country — but I don't think they'll be the last. We live in the most violent century in history. Nothing makes us immune from that violence except a relentless commitment to respect the sanctity of each human life, from womb to natural death. The civility and community we've built in this country are fragile. We're losing them. In examining how and why our culture markets violence, I ask you not to stop with the symptoms.

Look deeper. The families in Littleton and throughout the country deserve at least that much.

In separate incidents over the past two weeks, gunmen have killed three persons and wounded 13 others in Gilroy, CA; killed at least 20 and wounded 26 others in El Paso TX; and killed at least nine and wounded 27 others in Dayton, OH. These are just the latest in a long pattern of mass shootings; shootings that have blood-stained the past two decades with no end in sight.

Now begins the usual aftermath: expressions of shock; hand-wringing about senseless (or racist, or religious, or political) violence; bitter arguments about gun control; heated editorials, earnest (but brief) self-searching of the national soul, and eventually — we're on to the next crisis.

I buried some of the young Columbine victims 20 years ago. I sat with their families, watched them weep, listened to their anger, and saw the human wreckage that gun violence leaves behind. The experience taught me that assault rifles are not a birthright, and the Second Amendment is not a Golden Calf. I support thorough background checks and more restrictive access to guns for anyone seeking to purchase them.

But it also taught me that only a fool can believe that “gun control” will solve the problem of mass violence. The people *using* the guns in these loathsome incidents are moral agents with twisted hearts. And the twisting is done by the culture of sexual anarchy, personal excess, political hatreds, intellectual dishonesty, and perverted freedoms that we've systematically created over the past half-century.

So I'll say it again, 20 years later. Treating the symptoms in a culture of violence doesn't work. We need to look deeper. Until we're willing to do that, nothing fundamental will change.

And as Pastor, I will add: The message of Jesus Christ is precisely what our culture needs at this time. And it is being rejected out of hand because its values contradict the dominant cultural ethos. It has been said that “there are none so blind as those who will not see.” Are we now the ones who just will not see?

Peace,

Msgr. McHenry



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