



Immaculate Conception
Church

Homily for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A 2014

The town was called Weimar. It was Christmas eve and the members of the town gathered in their church and sang their beloved "Silent Night." Certainly a sight fit for a Christmas card but that's only part of the picture.

For down the road was the infamous concentration camp known as Buchenwald. It would have been impossible for the people of Weimar to miss the smoke and smell the odor of burning human flesh coming from the ovens. But they went on singing "Silent Night."

So incensed was General Eisenhower that on April 15, 1945 at the end of World War II, the people of Weimar were made to walk through Buchenwald so they could witness the evidence of the atrocities that were committed there. Eisenhower wanted to know "why." Why didn't they say anything or raise their voices in the face of such evil?

Sadly, the bishops of the Church in Germany were no better than the townspeople of Weimar. They also said nothing of the evil that took place not only in Buchenwald, but also in Auschwitz and in so many other concentration camps.

That changed at the dawn of the Second Vatican Council in 1964 when the Bishops of Germany publicly apologized for the "Inhumane extermination of the Jewish People." They were ashamed of the "awful injustices that were perpetrated against the Jews in the name of the German People."

It strikes me that the lesson to be learned from the story of Weimar and Buchenwald and the silence of the German Bishops, is the responsibility that we have as individuals and as a Church to speak against any action that ultimately destroys life. And that is not always easy to do.

Last week Bishop Tobin made a very simple statement of principle. He said: "It is always disappointing when a Catholic candidate for political office abandons the teaching of the Church on the dignity of human life for the sake of self-serving political gain." He didn't point a finger at anyone but rather articulated a principle that is more than worthy of consideration and respect. For, in fact, life is God's most precious gift and no one, for any reason, at any time in life, has the right to terminate life. From conception to natural death all of life is a gift from God and we can never do less than respect and honor it. To do anything else would be to betray who we are as a people of faith. I respect Bishop Tobin for speaking out rather than remaining silent. He learned well the lesson of the 1940s and the silence of both people and bishops in the face of the horror of life being treated so cheaply.

The Gospel today presents us with God's vineyard. And God entrusts us with this vineyard that is the life of the world...of our world. And God commands us to insure that all that is good and all that is beautiful fare well in this vineyard. Unlike the stewards in the Gospel we cannot allow selfishness or greed to interfere with the command to allow the vineyard of life to grow and mature and reflect the goodness and mercy of God who is the source of all life.

My prayer is that each of us today and on all days will hold ourselves accountable for honoring and defending the gift of life. And I pray that in whatever manner we vote we honestly and courageously vote in a manner that reflects our respect for life that is the great vineyard that God entrusts to us.