

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Feb. 23-24, 2019)  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

So, I have written a new fairy tale, and I would like for you to be the first to hear it. Are you ready? Here goes:

Once upon a time...

... Bill and Hillary Clinton were walking along the beach on Long Island. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

As they walked, they talked about their lives – the past, the future. And, as you can imagine, during the conversation one name kept coming up: *Donald Trump*.

Hillary said to Bill: “He ruined everything. How did he defeat me? He is ruining our country. He’s ruining the world. He ruined our lives. I just can’t stand him.”

Then, something unexpected occurred. They looked ahead and they saw President Trump, sitting on the beach eating a bucket of Ukrop’s chicken! (when you are President, you can get anything!)

Mr. Trump was wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, and there were no secret service officers anywhere.

Hillary said to Bill, “I’m going to go over there and tell him how much I despise him and his policies. This is my chance to finally unleash all of my anger upon that evil man.”

Bill and Hillary headed for Mr. Trump.

But, before they got to him, something strange happened. At first, Bill and Hillary did not know what was happening. Then it became clear – the president was choking on a piece of Ukrop’s chicken. Hillary said to Bill, “He is choking! We have to help him!”

But Bill said to Hillary: “Now Darlin’, wait a minute. Let’s think this through. That is the man you hate most in the world. He is your political rival. He defeated you. He is going to ruin the economy, ruin the country, destroy the planet and kill the Easter Bunny!”

“So, Hillary, why don’t we just stand here and let the chicken do what it’s gonna do! And tonight, the man who ruined your life will face eternal judgment. And tomorrow, we’ll have a new president (And, I’ll eat the leftover chicken)!”

But Hillary said: “No. He is the president. And, he is a child of God. And I am a child of God. So we have to spare him.”

Hillary performed the Heimlich maneuver, and the president could breathe again. And before he woke up, Bill and Hillary slipped away quietly. For a while, Mr. Trump didn’t know who had spared his life that day.

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What do you think? Should retire from priesthood and publish children’s books?

Or, are you sitting there saying, “Father, that’s not a fairy tale. That’s science fiction! Everyone knows that something like that couldn’t happen.”

Ah. *But it did.* And we hear all about it in today’s first reading!

Once upon a time – 1400 years before Christ – a handsome man named Saul was chosen by God to be king of Israel. At first everyone loved Saul.

Then, as often happens, this politician became selfish and self-centered. He loved power, and violence.

He wanted to maintain his political power forever, but along came another handsome Israelite named David. People loved David, too, and Saul became jealous of this political rival. Anger consumed Saul.

So, Saul led 3000 troops out into the desert to kill David, his enemy.

But one night, something strange happened. David found out where Saul was encamped. David went to check things out. And – surprise! - everyone was asleep: King Saul was asleep, his troops were asleep, his generals, the secret service. They were all passed out in the sand.

Picture this scene which the Bible offers us: Saul wants to get rid of David. But David is standing there, with Abishai his assistant right by his side. Saul, his enemy, is asleep on the ground.

Abishai says to David: 'It's a miracle! God has blessed you! With one thrust of the sword, this evil man will be gone. Tonight he'll face eternal judgement. And tomorrow, Israel will have a new king, and it will be YOU! Let's get rid of Saul right now!'

David pauses for a moment, then says: "No. He is the king, anointed by God." David refused to harm his enemy, because he knew that even Saul, his enemy, was a child of God. David, too, was a child of God.

*David refused to destroy the man who was trying to destroy him.*

And the next day, King Saul found out that David, a child of God, had spared his life.

My story about Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Trump may have startled you. When the story of Saul and David was first told, it startled people too.

Just as Jesus startled people in today's Gospel, when he said things like:

*"Love your enemies.*

*Do good to those who hate you.*

*Bless those who curse you.*

*Pray for those who mistreat you."*

Jesus, are you *out of your mind?*

No, he's not out of his mind. **He is revealing the mind of God.**

Have you noticed that, in today's political and cultural climate, we are no longer allowed to 'agree to disagree.'

If you hold a position different from mine, today my job is not to respect you or dialog with you... my job is to *destroy* you.

If you think thoughts that are different from mine, I don't debate you... I find ways to destroy your reputation, your relationships.

Today, people are so full of rage and anger that they are no longer content to beat their opponent in the next election – some people quite literally want their opponents to *die*.

And it's not just politicians. When some Kentucky high school students committed the cardinal sin of wearing a "Make American Great Again" hat, people on twitter literally called for them

and their parents to die.

And more recently, the editor of an Alabama paper said in an interview, “It’s time to get out the hemp ropes and loop Democrats over a tall limb.”

Surrounded by angry stories like this, we need to come to church to hear stories like today’s first reading. It begins as the story of two political rivals, who are trapped in the cycle of anger, hate, jealousy. Then it becomes the story of David, who *could* have killed Saul, but instead said, “Even Saul, who hates me, is a child of God, created in God’s image. So I must be merciful.”

We need to hear the story of Jesus, preaching to the crowds. And yes, we need to be startled as he says things like,

*“Love your enemies,  
and do good to them.  
Be merciful, as God is merciful.  
Forgive, and you will be forgiven.  
Stop judging.  
Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*

These words apply to kings and politicians. They also apply to moms and dad, husbands and wives, family members, neighbors, children, priests, people of every age.

Let me ask you: is there someone in your life that you really don’t like? Is there someone you’re struggling to deal with? Is there someone who causes deep anger in you?

(In other words, to whom would you like to give a big bucket of Ukrop’s Chicken on the beach?)

Have you found yourself thinking, “The world would be so much more pleasant, if THAT PERSON wasn’t in it?”

If there is such a person in your life, the Bible is very clear: You do not have permission to hate them. Your anger toward them will destroy you. Your lack of compassion will rob you of your God-given dignity.

The mind of God is very clear in today’s readings: If there is someone you despise, someone you can’t stand, someone you struggle with, the Living God says: *Love them.*

How can you start doing that? Well, perhaps you could try *praying for them.* And not this prayer: “Dear Lord, help that despicable person to see what a rat fink they have been, through Christ our

Lord. Amen.”

No. Instead, picture the person with whom you are most angry. With Gospel compassion, try to understand what pain THAT person may have experienced, or is experiencing now. And then pray:

“Lord Jesus, bless that person. They are your child, and I am your child. You love us all. Lord, you love the person I hate. You died for both of us. Help me to see in them what you see in them.”

And... if the two of you meet in heaven, that person may say to you, “Hey, I thought you hated me.” And you can say, “I thought I did too. But then I prayed for you.”

And the two of you can say in the same breath, “Isn’t it wonderful to be children of God?”

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