

St. Paul and School Shootings

In these days following the school shooting in Parkland Florida, we all have mused on what must be done to end such insane violence. This is what we do after every school shooting... and then we go back to our "normal" life until it happens again. Hopefully, this time our nation declares "Enough" and we act to make changes. While I do not have the solution, I think St. Paul offers us insight about this matter. You may be thinking that guns did not even exist at the time of St. Paul; what can he offer us? You are right; guns did not exist at the time, but meat did. Before you have me probated, let me explain.

In I Corinthians 10: 23-33, there was a situation that Christians faced in this city of temples and sacrifices to many gods. The meat from the pagan sacrificial victims was sold in the market places, where people could buy it simply as meat, or as a way to have a meal in communion with the god it was sacrificed to. For Christians who believed that there was only one God, the meat was simply seen as meat with no spiritual connections to other gods since they did not exist. Other Christians believed that, while the God of Jesus Christ is THE God, there were other gods and spirits who existed, and that eating meat sacrificed to them, even if the consumer did not believe in that god or spirit, put them in communion with that god, clearly contrary to the command, "You shall worship the Lord, your God and him alone shall you serve." For the latter group, eating the meat could lead to the scandal of people keeping one foot in the camp of the pagan gods and the other in the camp of Christ. (*Scandal* in the moral sense is not shock at what someone does, but rather the impression that an act is OK to do because others are doing it.)

Paul addresses the issue first by declaring that even though it is lawful to eat this kind of meat, it is not necessarily beneficial to do so.

(He is speaking here about what is beneficial not only for the eater, but also for the community.) He acknowledges that for the Christian who believes that there is but one God and no others exist, there is no problem eating the meat in and of itself. But if by eating the meat, others get the impression that the eaters are communing with other gods, they cannot eat that meat.

At first reaction this seems unfair. They are in fact not eating to commune with other gods. Paul's point, however, is that as persons reborn into Christ, we do not act for our own advantage, but we live for the sake of others. If that demands that we forego what is lawfully ours, we forego it.

Now, back to the 21st century and our sad situation of school violence. Are we willing to give up what might be legal and in itself good to protect others? Are we willing to pay the increase in taxes to provide the mental health treatment and screening that we so easily call for? We, as a nation, rightly cherish the freedoms we have. Yet, we have to realize that, as St. Paul says, "Everything is lawful, but not everything is beneficial." I Cor 10:23 Freedoms are not given to us solely for our own benefit, but for the common good as well. The freedom to live is the highest freedom. Just as we believe that the unborn child's right to life may infringe the right to control one's own body, so too, we need to see that *some reasonable regulation* of weapons, if necessary, safeguards a student's right to live. We like to live free from taxes, but does that trump the protection our communities need to safeguard human life? To live in Christ is a gift given freely to us. There is a cost we pay however, in this life, in order to come to the fullness of life. Let us always look at the bigger picture.

A blessed 40 days. (Well, 33 now.) - Fr. Jeff