

A Short Story - Cowardice
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but
rather of power and love and self-control. (2 Tim 1:7).

For nothing makes the soul a coward save the consciousness of a wicked life.
(ST,FS, Q129, A5)

How does one prove his courage? In a military context it is an observable behavior of taking up arms and moving into the conflict even as the person is aware of the grave dangers it entails to do so. Entering combat has with it both a physical and moral consequence that is often life-long. We honor the courage of soldiers and veterans specifically because of their evidenced courage and the moral burden they bear that comes from armed conflict. This is the case in every age and in every culture.

There is a lot of moral anguish for some soldiers as they go through the process of integration of the wartime experience after the fact. There is a need to grasp the simultaneous presence of imperative and innocence with aggravating behaviors and circumstances the soldier would have never imagined for self or his squad.

Moral courage for a soldier comes into play usually in the preparation phase. Here in the quiet of the mind a person can more fully appreciate the gravity of the situation. A soldier must grapple with the moral dimension of the battle: the when, where, who, how and purpose. In the end and at the minimum, a well formed person will assess these moral questions and make a decision in the face of the consequences.

“I did it for God.” I was a little startled by the answer. In a time of reflection and introspection he told me his story. I don’t think you need details. In warfare you repeat successful techniques. The more successful the battle plan the duller the conscience. Again and again. Knowing he fulfilled his sacramental duty of perfect contrition, I offered this forward looking view. “Even now you can do the holy work of God”. “But, I did it for God”.

A few months have passed now. He is nearly a daily communicant. Sometimes we talk, sometimes we pray about his ravaged body writhing in pain from combat injuries, sometimes we go back to the battlefield. Slowly, by grace, a newness of thought comes, certain innocence returns in regard to the enemy and in regard to himself a refactoring of reasons and reactions. This is evidence of moral courage.

Moral cowardice includes a complete disregard for morality even basic moral constructs agreeable to nearly every spiritual framework (Prudence, Temperance, Courage and Justice). We see the evidence of profound moral cowardice in President Trump.

The President's dubious hold on Christian values and morals is now made evident in his self and entourage pardon scheme. He does not possess the moral character to face the consequences of his actions. For the President, morality is an unnecessary extrinsic influence that interferes with a life based on alliance and advantage. He has surrounded himself with Sophists in order to provide the illusion of moral character and honorable purpose. He espouses public prayer and appoints Justices to appease and cultivate alliances. He will pardon himself from this too. We are the sheep and we do not do well under the hired hand Trump.

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11), says Christ. The metaphor recorded by John is expressive and full of meaning. We contemplate the shepherd in the sheepfold as the faithful keeper of each of the sheep. "He cares for the sheep", observes Jesus. He cares . . . and is concerned about them; he watches over them and is faithful; he is ready to face every danger which threatens them. He never flees or abandons the sheepfold as would a coward. He knows the sheep and calls them by name. For this reason they too know him, and listen to his voice. The she herd has their total trust. In fact he is ready to "lay down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:15): he offers himself always, every day and in every circumstance. He is truly "the man for others". (John Paul II).

Early Christian Fathers, Letters in Crisis, St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna to the Philippians

Let us, therefore, forsake the vanity of the crowd and their false teachings and turn back to the word delivered to us from the beginning, "watching unto prayer" and continuing steadfast in fasting, beseeching fervently the all-seeing God "to lead us not into temptation," even as the Lord said, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Moral cowardice is the most important warning sign you will get. From here on out, the choices are at a great and unnecessary cost. God save America.

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry

Disclaimer – Names, times and places are fictional or obscured to protect the privacy of others without distorting the essential truth of the encounter.

References: in-line