

Let Go of the Gun

Fr. Theophane, a monk at St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, tells a story about the time he went up to a monk who was working alone in the vegetable garden at the monastery:

"I squatted beside him and said:

'Brother, what is your dream'

He looked straight at me and said: 'I would like to be a monk.'

'But Brother, you are a monk, aren't you?'

'I've been here for 25 years... but I still carry my gun.'

He drew a revolver from the holster under his robe. It looked so strange — a monk carrying a gun!

'Are you saying they won't let you become a monk until you give up your gun?'

'No, it's not that. Most of them don't know I have a gun..., but I know.'

'Well then, why don't you give up the gun?'

'I guess because I've had it so long. I've been hurt a lot in life, and I've hurt a lot of others. I don't think I could feel secure or safe without the gun.'

'But you seem pretty uncomfortable with the gun...'

'Yes, pretty uncomfortable.... But I have my dream....'

'Why don't you just give me the gun?' I whispered. I was beginning to tremble.

'At that moment, he gave me the gun; his tears ran down to the ground and then he embraced me.' "

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Sisters and brothers, like the monk in the garden – we all have our dreams and in our Advent Scripture Isaiah and John the Baptist give us the first step necessary if our dreams and our dreams for the world are going to be realized:

a world where the swords of war will be melted into plowshares,

a world where the wolf shall be a guest of the Lamb,

a world where the eyes of the blind will be opened,

a world where the poor will have good news preached to them.

John the Baptist tells us, that to realize our dreams we first need to let go of our “guns,” ... we need to come clean with ourselves – as individuals and as a world, ...we need to get straight.

But, like the monk, we so often – in desperation – hold onto our “guns” — maybe for twenty-five years...; maybe for twenty-five days ...;

Like the monk, we hold onto things that promise to give us peace and security and safety but ultimately, bring us the opposite...;

- ...hold us in bondage,
- ...keep us paralyzed,
- ...keep us in darkness,
- ...keep us in fear and pain,
- ...keep us from becoming the persons and families, nation and world that God intended!

Biblically, we call these “guns” our demons, our idols, our sins.

Like the monk, if we are honest with ourselves, we know what these “guns” in our lives are, and even that they make our lives miserable.... yet, we hold onto them for dear life and can’t imagine life without them.

What are some of the “guns” we might be holding onto with all our might?

1. Maybe un-forgiveness: *if I don’t forgive, ...I won’t get hurt again;*
2. Maybe not trusting: *if I don’t trust anyone, ...I’ll be safe;*
3. Maybe jealousy, hatred and revenge: *somehow – we think – these poisons will protect us;*
4. Maybe greed, addiction to money and material stuff: *convinced that the more I have the happier I’ll be;*
5. Maybe struggling with addiction to alcohol, drugs, food, tobacco, sex, work, ... whatever; *that keeps us enslaved and ultimately makes us more miserable;*
6. Maybe our “gun” is the demon of shame and self-hatred and rejection: *that control us and keep us paralyzed.*

Sisters and brothers, and what about our Nation? We are in deep crisis, the seeds of which were sown a long time before Donald Trump, who in many ways is the manifestation of what we have become: holding on to our “guns” literally and figuratively, holding on to the myths that we are exceptional, we are king of the mountain, our way or the high-way... . And yet, like the monk in the garden, underneath it all is the fear, the deep anxiety that feeds all the ‘isms’ that divide us and that ultimately cause such suffering in our land and in the world... A microcosm of this difficulty is the scandalous humanitarian crisis at our southern border which Meg Ksander, Dale Avers and I with a number of others from the area, visited several weeks ago. After Communion, we’ll share some of what we witnessed that is being done in our name.

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Sisters and brothers, what must we do in our individual lives, in our Nation and in our world?  
Like the monk *we have to let go of our guns*; we need to surrender; we need to “Let go and let God!”  
In Biblical language we call it “Repentance:” John, the Baptist, cries out “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!”

“Repentance” means: turning away from all that binds us; all that oppresses us and others.

“Repentance” means: turning away from all violence and evil that control and corrupt us.

“Repentance” means: ultimately turning away from the power of death itself!

Until the monk was able to let go of his gun, let go of the false security that the gun gave him – even though in reality it was making him miserable – he never would have been able to realize his dream of really becoming a monk, becoming the person God intended him to be. He never would have been able to experience true peace... .  
And in our Nation, we will never realize the beautiful American Dream of “*e pluribus unum*,” of liberty, equality and democracy – unless we let go of our political ideologies, our nationalism and individualism.

But how do we let do we let go of our “guns”?

1. Break the denial ... get honest with ourselves;
2. Make a decision to let go;
3. Recognize that by ourselves we’re powerless to do this;
4. and so, we get on our knees and pray for the grace ... and we hand our gun to God.

A powerful way to ritualize these steps of handing over our “guns” to God, is to gather together and as a community to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Tomorrow at 7pm we’ll have our Advent Penance Service and together will pray for the grace to “let go” and celebrate God’s mercy and forgiveness and healing. A time for individual confessions will follow for those who wish and some of our children will celebrate the Sacrament for the first time!

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Sisters and brothers, the Third Sunday of Advent – *Gaudete* Sunday – is celebrated with joy... symbolized by our lighting of the pink candle.

In last Sunday’s reading, Isaiah talks about a little child guiding us and I can’t help but think of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, living with Asperger’s Syndrome – a form of autism – who was celebrated as Time Magazine’s ‘Person of the Year’ for her part in raising the World’s consciousness regarding Global Warming. What a sign this is of hope: ultimately light will overcome darkness... if we hand our guns to God.

Amen!