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A PERSONAL WORD FOR YOU from Mack McCarter

“From Allendale To Afghanistan And Back Again: The Power Of Applied Love, II”

One of the heroes of my childhood was the Roman Catholic Bishop, Fulton J. Sheen. Bishop Sheen was on television weekly and rivaled the star of early t.v. days, Milton Berle (“Mr. Saturday Night”) in ratings and audience. He was a most uncommon man, was Bishop Sheen! He stood and taught wonderful lessons of life with only a blackboard for a prop. But God had gifted him with the skill to bring home to the human heart words of comfort and truth in helpful and meaningful ways.

In my later years, I discovered Bishop Sheen’s writings and I have eagerly devoured them. In his book, The Life of Christ, Bishop Sheen speaks of the power of love to remake our lives. But again, in his own wonderful way, he brings the truth so soundly to each of our doorsteps. “Life is a song of God’s love. And each of us will inevitably hit a sour note in the singing of that song. But that should never be the end of our singing. Because of God’s love for each of us, He enables us to make that sour note, *the first note of a whole new song.*”

I have thought of Bishop Sheen over and over since September the Eleventh. And I believe that God sees this awful act as a terribly sour note in His symphony of hope for the whole of His creation. *But I am firmly convinced that He can take us and use us to make that sour note the first note in a whole new world wide symphony of brotherly love! And I believe that the answers are at our very fingertips.* What must we do to remake our world?

Before we can do anything, I believe that we must commit ourselves to one fundamental conviction: ***Only the Love of God, mediated through human personality, can change the heart of man, and therefore the soul of our world.***

All love, that is, seeking the good of the other as priority, is God’s love. Folks, we didn’t invent it. It was here when we came on board. And just as the sky or the water or the firmament was here, so love and hope and faith were here. We creatures have grown to live and move within the mediums of those realities. Fish move through the medium of water, birds soar in the ether of the air, and creatures stand on the land to appropriate its stage for their being. So in the reality of love, we are called to live and move and have our being. All true love is God’s love, it is not of our making, we can only learn to appropriate it ***And only the Love of God, mediated through human personality, can change the heart of man, and therefore the soul of our world.***

No program however clever; no person however rich, or smart, or powerful, can transform the heart of another and move them from fundamental self-centered living to predominantly other centered connectedness. Only Love (and all true love is God’s Love) can do what no man can do. Now this truth is ***the*** foundational truth upon which everything else must rest. (Indeed, the great builder/sages of the human race all testify to this conviction as *a priori*. Read Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Augustine, Descartes,

Anselm, Kierkegaard, Kant and on and on and on!) So it follows that to heal our world, nations must be changed, and if nations, then cities, and if cities, then neighborhoods, and if neighborhoods, then persons.

Only the love of God can create the conditions necessary for persons to change.

In this vein, Lewis Mumford wrote startling words in his 1955 book, The Transformations of Man: ***“Our present age, beyond any other, should understand the urgency of this question. For man’s humanity is now threatened by the possibility of relapsing into a barbarism more elemental than has ever been encountered in historic times. Though culture itself tends to be cumulative, in the process of taking it over each generation starts from scratch. Without parental love, without filial veneration, without a secure sense of the future, the very effort to become human may miscarry. Through over reliance upon mechanism and automatism our generation has begun to lose the secret of nurturing man’s humanness, since he gives too little care to the conditions that make each member of the community sensitive, tender, imaginative, morally responsible, self-governing, disposed to imitate human ideals and to emulate ideal examples of humanity.”***

It is obvious, therefore, that we must understand the call to reproduce the conditions necessary for the Love of God to flourish in our lives and in the life of our neighborhoods. And it stands to reason, if we cannot do this in Shreveport and Bossier City, then what do we have to say to Kabul and Kandahar? But, in fact, I believe that we have much to say, to teach, and to listen and to learn from our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. Building on love, where do we start?

First of all, each of us must recognize the necessity of developing what I call, “a with-ness consciousness.” We, in America, did not believe that we were connected with the Taliban. To our horror on September 11th, we found out that we were connected. The people in Southern Trace probably do not realize that they are connected with the people in Allendale, but in myriad ways, those invisible ties that bind us together can be shown to be quite real and quite inescapable.

Analysts tell us that we abandoned the Afghan people after their defeat of the Russians. We did not believe that we were still connected with them. We did not use the reality of that connectedness to build their capacity to live whole and complete lives. It is a painful lesson. Because dark forces took over and begin to bend young, willing minds to foul messages.

We are connected here in Shreveport and Bossier City. Do not deny it. If a child grows up in Allendale robbed of the conditions that can help him grow in hope and love, one day he will meet your son or daughter and rob them. If children grow up with perpetual pain and hurt, then what will prevent them from hurting your children? Terrorism is new to most of us. Just months old. In Allendale they have known it for years. And we are connected with them. We must use our connectedness to bring new life to Allendale and all other neighborhoods living in terror – otherwise why go to Afghanistan? But you will see that the battle is real and is winnable here ***and*** there!! Then we will have true peace on each and good will toward all men. For this I thank God and each of you. (Continued next month!)