

**HOMILY**  
**August 13, 2006**

**Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski**  
**St. John the Evangelist Parish**  
**Davison, Michigan**

A true story is told about two altar boys. One was born in 1892 in Eastern Europe. The other was born just three years later in a small town in Illinois. Though they lived very separate lives in very different parts of the world, these two altar boys had almost identical experiences. Each boy was given the opportunity to assist his parish priest at the altar. While handling the wine and water, they both accidentally spilled some of the wine on the carpet by the altar. There, the similarity in their story ends. The priest in the Eastern European church, seeing the purple stain, slapped the altar boy across the face and shouted, "Clumsy oaf! Leave the altar." The little boy grew up to become an atheist and a Communist. His name was Marshal Josip Tito, dictator of Yugoslavia for 37 years.

The priest in the church in Illinois, upon seeing the stain near the altar, knelt down beside the boy and looked him tenderly in the eyes and said, "It's alright son, you'll do better next time. You'll be a fine priest for God some day." That little boy grew up to become the much-loved Bishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Here, my friends, is a timely message. In today's second reading Paul says, "Remove all bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling. Be kind and compassionate to one another." Let's talk for a few moments about kindness. There are some people who are going to hear these words from Paul about living a life of love and they are going to think to themselves, "What mush! Don't you know you have to be tough to survive in the real world? Kindness and compassion are for wimps, not for real life."

Read the record and you will discover that Jesus was no wimp. Neither was St. Paul. These were men of courage. They knew how to stare both danger and death in the face. Yet they also knew that little is to be gained by escalating anger and revenge into a more serious confrontation. They knew that if you live by "an eye for an eye" creed, it can only produce a downward spiral of revenge and resentment.

There is no getting around it—violence breeds violence. Whether it is physical or verbal, hatred breeds hatred. We can turn a minor disagreement into a major conflict by the way we handle our anger. As members of this globe, we have to work very hard to curbing hatreds and not lashing back in revenge.

Someone told me that at the Ripley’s Believe It or Not Museum in Niagara Falls, Canada, there is a small wooden idol on display. It is the North African God of Hate. Every nail that is driven into that idol is a wish by someone that calamity will befall his enemy.

There is an East African saying that goes like this,

*Me and Somalia against the world.  
Me and my tribe against Somalia.  
Me and my family against my tribe.  
Me and my brother against my family.  
Me against my brother.*

We can see this ethic at work in many places in the world today with tragic results. It is why our country must be very careful how we respond to attacks on us, whether they are physical or verbal. Somebody has to break the cycle of violence and hatred. Someone has to be an adult in a world of children.

What is true of the world outside can be even more deadly within the family. George’s marriage had gone through tumultuous times. One night George passed a breaking point. He pounded the table and the floor. He screamed at his wife, “I hate you! I’ve had enough! I won’t take it any more! No! No! No!”

Several months later, George woke up in the middle of the night and heard strange sounds from the room where his two-year-old son slept. As he stood outside his son’s door, shivers ran through his body. In his sleep, the two-year-old was repeating word for word, with the same inflection, the argument between his mother and father. “I hate you! I won’t take it any more. No! No! No!” George realized that in some awful way he had just bequeathed his pain and anger and unforgiveness to the next generation.

And so we have children growing up filled with all kinds of rage learned in the home. We have teenagers estranged from parents, grown men and women estranged from their siblings, husbands and wives, who once loved and supported each other, torn by resentments that have built up over the years. We have nations who come from the same God and Father determined to wipe the other off the earth.

Friends, this is serious stuff.

In an old monastery in Babenhausen, Germany, one may see two pairs of deer antlers permanently interlocked. They were found in that position many years ago. Apparently, the animals had been fighting fiercely and their horns became so tangled that they could not be disengaged. As a result, both deer perished from hunger. Some of the most precious relationships we have can be destroyed if someone is not willing to play the adult and turn the other cheek.

I read an interesting fact recently from the Civil War. Both armies in the north and the south possessed bullets that not only penetrated the enemy, but also exploded upon impact. Whereas regular bullets disabled the enemy, the exploding bullet caused a much nastier wound. It turned out that the danger was not simply to the enemy, a number of Union soldiers who were carrying the rounds at Gettysburg had hot shrapnel set off the rounds right next to their own bodies. These soldiers received the same fate as people with car bombs in the Middle East whose bombs have exploded prematurely.

Hatred and revenge have a lot in common with exploding rifle bullets; they are likely to prove as deadly to the person carrying them as they were supposed to be for their intended victim.

Paul writes, “Remove all bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling along with malice.” Then Paul adds, “Be imitators of God, and God’s beloved children, and live in love.” What does he mean, “Be imitators of God”? All the anger and hatred of humanity were focused that day long ago when the innocent Son of God hung on the cross on Calvary.

What was God's response? Wipe us off the globe? God could have done so and been totally justified. Instead, God played the adult to humanity's petulant child. God took that awful event and used it to save you and me from our sins.

Look at the cross. We hated, but God loved. We struck out in blind fury, but God responded with unconditional acceptance. We shut him out, but God opened his heart and his life and brought us in.

With all the violence in the world and all the threats of violence, we are called to be imitators of God. So, again, those words are for you and me, right now in 2006. *Be imitators of God.* Remove all bitterness and anger and shouting among you. As God's beloved children, live with his love.

And so, are you a peacemaker? Are you following the way of God? Are you imitating him, not just with your lips, but do your deeds match them as well?