

CRIBBS NOTES – September 16, 2007

Everybody makes mistakes. On any given day, we stumble, fumble, and sometimes fall flat on our face. It happens no matter how hard we try to get things right. We are prone to fail. In his “Essay on Criticism,” the English poet Alexander Pope penned, “To err is human, to forgive divine.” This simple, familiar phrase succinctly describes the human predicament and provides good instruction about how to deal with our mess.

We have a desire to return hurt and disappointment with a similar fate to those who cause us injury. We quickly and momentarily forget our own insults and assaults as we pursue “justice” against those who hurt us. We might even say it’s a natural reaction. Yet, when we pause long enough to remember what we have done in fits of anger or unintentionally, we may discover sufficient humility to give someone else a break. We may even experience God’s love within us; that is, the ability to forgive.

How many times have you wanted to make someone suffer because they did something that totally violated your sensibility? Maybe they came from a group of people you just can’t stand to be near. Or, perhaps, they belong to a particular political party or religious group you find outrageous. Whatever their identity or passion, it may be more than you can stomach. And, then, it happens. On top of everything else, they offend you in a specific and personal way. What do you do? How do you go on?

Sometimes we have to confront forces resident within us. Ideally, we want to believe we possess positive powers that guide our actions and reactions to events that come into our lives. But, the truth is, we are a mixed bag of good and evil. Things we never imagined possible can occur by our very hands. We are capable of doing dastardly deeds against other human beings. In fact, it is almost certain we act in ways that bring harm to people and God’s Creation innumerable times; almost constantly. That is a harsh statement but think about it.

Without much provocation, we engage in the destruction of civilizations we do not understand. We support aggression in countries we have never visited or heard of in our lives. While we are sleeping acts of violence take place in our names and with our tax dollars. Even if we don’t give much thought to the geo-political agenda mapped out by minions who conduct the business of war, we must assess our responsibility and the benefits we reap. It may be called “preserving our way of life” or “acting in the national interest.” However it is justified, the intent is to keep us compliant without complaint or opposition.

We commit the human error of dismissing people who cross our paths. We don’t see the tattered child or grubby man on the street. The woman carrying bags with all her belongings doesn’t register with us. Native Americans who have had their way of life completely destroyed or re-arranged are not considered as we travel on their homeland. Smog fills the air, mercury is in the sea, water is not drinkable, and the earth is poisoned with herbicides. It all seems beyond our ability to correct. We just live with things as they are and don’t think too much about it.

God sees it all. God knows what we do and is aware of our potential to do better. So, what will we do? Can we take our mistakes and transform them into life lessons? Are we willing to accept our humanity with its flaws and become more compassionate? Will we practice daily disciplines of acting kindly and being more loving to family, friends and strangers?

It is through God’s grace we are forgiven. It is our choice what we do with such a divine blessing. We can restore the earth. We can heal human divides. We can forgive. We need each other to get it right. What will we do?