

Daily Meditation 06/05/2022

Thomas Merton on Idolatry

Good morning.

We continue our meditations today on the topic of idolatry.

Yesterday, we heard from Thomas Aquinas, a great philosopher, theologian, and saint, that idolatry is truly one of the most serious of all sins. And we related the topic of idolatry directly to the gun culture of our time.

Some people, not all, but some people have a relationship to their guns as they do to an idol. And it links readily to the ideology of money and power and politics. These, too, are idols. The idea that one must remain a Supreme Court judge or, say, a Senator at all costs. Such people worshipping guns carry blood on their hands, whether they're politicians or whether they're judges, when they cannot separate themselves enough from their idol, from their addiction to see that other people are hurting, profoundly. And whole communities are hurting profoundly because of their inability to step back and get a perspective on what they worship.

Thomas Merton, a great Catholic monk who died in 1968 wrote very, very powerfully about idolatry in our time and its connection to bad religion. He says "the religion of half-religious people." Half-religious people.

He's not saying half of the religious people but people who are only half religious. The other half of them are idolaters. Their guns carry more weight than their religion--the religion of peace, compassion and justice, for example.

"The religion of half-religious people doesn't tend to calm down people and reassure people, rather it bristles with many heads." (Many heads, when we say many guns.)

And Merton says, "This is the greatest orgy of idolatry the world has ever known. And it is not generally thought by believers that idolatry is the greatest and fundamental sin." Something that Aquinas said yesterday.

Says Merton, "Anyone who sells out to even a small inoffensive bargain-cheap idol has alienated himself and put himself into the statue and has to act like it, which is he has to be dead."

That's one of the arguments against idolatry, the idols of statues. The statue is not alive, it's dead. Why would you worship something dead? Well, an AR-15 is dead. And worshiping that, you'd have to be dead, is what Merton is saying. And this is true not just of politicians, but of judges, as well.

So we have to get big money out of big politics and that will diminish the idolatry at stake here. But unfortunately, some Supreme Court decisions have encouraged dark money, encouraged money coming from nowhere that we know to be poured into politics. And a lot of it results in murders, the innocence and rupture of communities.

Now we have these so-called originalists on the Supreme Court who say, "Oh, we have to interpret everything the way the thinkers thought, the Constitutional writers thought in 1789." But in 1789, no one thought about AR-15s. Not a single constitutional signer thought of AR-15s.

So what right do AR-15s have to go loose in the year 2022? What they had 1789 was muskets! I have no problem with people carrying their muskets wherever they want to go in our world today. The musket gives time to interfere. It's time for onlookers to jump people who want to kill people with muskets in supermarkets or muskets in grade school.

How can anyone say that the founders of this country wanted everyone 18 and up to have access to assault weapons, like AR-15s, wherever--church and supermarkets and elementary schools and high schools and dance halls and theaters?

Something is amiss. Something is amiss. And its proper name is idolatry.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.