

Casey Anthony and the Lost Sheep
Trinity III, July 10, 2011

Like many other Americans, I have been much troubled this past week by the news of the verdict of acquittal of Casey Anthony in Florida. As I'm sure you know, Casey Anthony was the mother of a beautiful little two-year old girl who was found dead in the woods near her family home in Florida a couple of years ago. The circumstantial evidence seems overwhelming that Casey was complicit in the murder of her daughter, but the jury in Orlando did not believe the evidence was strong enough to convict Casey Anthony of murder.

Of course, I don't know whether Casey Anthony committed this crime, and I really didn't follow the case, which seemed to almost completely consume the news media over the past several months. But what does strike me about this matter, coupled with several other murders and crimes that have been in the news recently, is just how far down into the gutter our society seems to have sunk. We seem to have lost almost all sense of the Ten Commandments, and in this case of the commandment against murder, "Thou shalt not kill."

The late Pope John Paul II talked and wrote eloquently about what he called the culture of death in our postmodern, secularized Western society. And he contrasted that with the Church's culture of life. "The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message," wrote John Paul in his encyclical *Evangelium vitae* ("The Gospel of life"). "Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture." The Pope noted developments in Western society that he called "a significant cause of grave moral decline" and stated that "Choices once unanimously considered criminal and rejected by the common moral sense are gradually becoming socially acceptable."

When I look around, I see the deterioration and even collapse of so many of our once-great Western institutions. These include a great many of our colleges and schools; a large number of governmental and public institutions and organizations; and of course many Christian Churches such as the Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church USA.

In our Epistle reading from the 1st Letter of Peter, that great prince of the apostles speaks of the devil, our adversary, as a roaring lion who prowls about and looks for people to "devour." This is reminiscent of Satan in the OT Book of Job, who is said to be walking back and forth over the earth. Both texts speak to this same sense of the rapacious restlessness of evil, which is on the hunt and looking for victims to destroy.

Evil is real, and it is a powerful force. And as C. S. Lewis pointed out so well in *The Screwtape Letters*, evil, the devil, loves nothing better than to dupe people into believing it/he doesn't really exist. Like the Big Bad Wolf in Little Red Riding Hood, evil and the devil wants you to pay no attention to those big, scary looking teeth and claws.

What we are doing in our little parish and Church is standing up for the faith once delivered to the saints. I would say this is also part of what Ruth and the Methodists' VBS are doing this coming week. The Church and the faith are under massive assault in the world today. And many parts of the Church have crumbled and fallen in the field. They do not know that they

have surrendered, but by compromising with the secular world and its values, they have. Proverbs 1:7 says that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” As a society and in many parts of the Church, the fear of the LORD has been lost.

In the parable of the lost sheep that we heard as our Gospel reading this morning, we learned from Jesus the wonderful news that God is always seeking for the soul that knows it is lost. And of course we know as believing and born-again Christians that every human being without God in Jesus Christ is lost. That is very beginning and first step in becoming a Christian and becoming saved and born again: to recognize our lost condition, our total need for God. And in Jesus Christ God has reached out to us in love and healing and reconciliation and grace and mercy and peace and all the good things that are hearts most deeply desire. Jesus is the good shepherd who goes to rescue that one sheep which knows he is lost.

At the end of the parable Jesus says that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents – much, much more than over the 99 who believe that they’re just fine.

Our job – your job and mine – is to do everything we can to support and encourage and bring the news of Jesus and of the Church to those lost souls who are all around us. In this world the guilty may well get away with it. But they certainly will not in the world to come, when we must all stand before the judgment seat of God and give a full accounting of our lives and our choices.