

## Sermon – Sunday May 14, 2023

Deacon Martha Farone

Objects of worship; an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'...

What a gift to have had the privilege of touring Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam; and the van Gogh Museum. Our son was stationed with the Navy at a base in the Netherlands; otherwise, the opportunity wouldn't have been ours to seize. A tour through the Ann Frank House was a sobering and painful walk-through of life experienced during one of its most brutal and inhumane times. Works of art, poetry, valued memorabilia on display. The occasion to view an exhibit at the Louvre, in Paris, coincided with our Christmastime reunion in Maastricht, Netherlands.

True, most of these were formed by imagination of mortals, yet I believe not to be viewed as objects of worship, rather as the creators' desire to offer his or her passion for an aspect of this world that held/holds profound meaning.

Many of us have had the chance to visit a local gallery, to wander through a fair or exhibit, to appreciate craftsmanship in many ways. The wares are different but fashioned with tender loving care. I have a friend who designs jewelry and each piece is accompanied by a poetic description of the stones and charms and how they came to have meaning in the creation.

In today's reading from Acts, Paul, who had been brought before an Athenian council or court, accepted the challenge of "bridge building" as he addresses the Athenians. Though an alien here, Paul chooses to not ridicule their beliefs and values or criticize Greek philosophy or poetry. He acknowledges "how extremely religious" they are as he observed their objects of worship. Using points familiar to them, he finds common ground on which to create a dialog. In this hearing, he is able to express the futility of idol worship and to present to his hearers, the value in meaningful relationship- in part, using the words of Greek poets, 'For we too are his offspring'.

Today's Gospel calls each of us to remember Jesus' words, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments; recall the greatest of these includes loving God and neighbor as self. Words encouraging bridge building and relationship...implicit, I believe-the understanding that the dignity of all is to be respected.

Today in some circles, Rogation Sunday will be celebrated. In fact, that was to be my focus before the importance of acknowledging the one-year anniversary of the shooting on the East Side of Buffalo and the imperative of stepping up to advocate for an end to gun violence was presented by the Commission to Dismantle Racism and Discrimination. Bear with me as I try to weave together how each of these, today's readings, my story, the precious litany we recite as Prayers of the People, a collective voice raised to our Creator, is a reality, is a call to which each of us may respond. While the choice to respond is up to each individual, our Baptismal Promises are a serious reminder of our responsibility.

There are contemporary idols that each of us worship in place of God, however it might be that one perceives God. I ask that we contemplate this: Idolatry is in some form responsible for the gross global inequality the world faces, and its environmental challenges. The ideas that follow are presented by The Rev. Ruth Newton and I find them valuable words to contemplate and take to heart, and pray that you do, too. She says, "Idolatry of wealth, power, success and status leading to the accumulation of vastly more resources than are needed on the part of some, while others are left with not enough. Idolatry that fails to recognize that God made the world not solely as a resource for humans to use and abuse but as a source of

delight and to tell of his glory; Idolatry whereby people seek to be their own gods and live without reference to the one who made them or the concern for the needs of others. The call to repent from idolatry and turn to the true God is as relevant for our contemporary world as it was for when Paul was preaching. Remembering whose world this is, and in whom we “live and move and have our being” will inevitably change our relationship with both the natural world and with each other. As we seek to unravel the multiple ecological and sustainability challenges facing humanity over the next decade, we would do well to remember the advice in Proverbs 9:10 that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. This makes Christian engagement in the public sphere of the kind that Paul undertook in the Areopagus of vital importance.”

What if we, as individuals and corporate community, as Jesus Followers, lovingly viewed all creation (ourselves included) as objects of art, invaluable treasures, priceless handiwork, tenderly crafted and placed upon the Earth? By the power of the Holy Spirit, our promised advocate, might we speak with each other in the love language of poets? Will we build bridges, albeit, demanding and tedious work at times, understanding that we are woven together, interconnected, though diverse, in the gifts brought forward for the common good? And this includes not only the human family but all entities of the kingdom. (A word that Fr. Joe shared with us last week.)

This morning, with tears of sorrow yet with hearts filled with hope and joy, we raise our voices together with our sisters, brothers, siblings in Christ, Paul and all the saints preceding, to speak out against gun violence, discrimination in any form, and the reckless, careless abuse of this planet. Indeed, we are not left as orphans. Might we embrace the call, accept the invitation, cherish the value of all, not allowing “objects of worship” to confuse or blind us. As Beloved Community, pray that we are led by The Spirit of Truth to cherish, uphold, sustain, the remarkable artistry and poetry gifted us, by the author of Love.  
Amen