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Message for BBNeighbourhoods 23 June 2020

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

René Girard, the French historian, literary critic, and philosopher of social science, wrote that “There is an irresistible urge in human communities from time to time to purge themselves by choosing an innocent victim from among their ranks, on whom to blame all of their own faults and vileness” (*The Scapegoat*, 1989, p. 40). While he wrote these words towards the end of last century, I think that they are still relevant for us today, 20 years into the twenty-first century.

There seems to be an irresistible temptation in human nature to blame others. In the English language, we even have the verb “to scapegoat” which means to blame someone for something bad that has happened. Scapegoat has its origins in the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically the Book of Leviticus:

“Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness”.
(Leviticus 16:21-22)

The original concept was to confess one’s transgressions or sins and then to be freed from them by ritually placing them on the head of the goat. Unfortunately, the true meaning of acknowledgement of failings, confession of sins, and liberation from past ways of living, has been lost in this context. The secular world simply defaults to blame. In our time, the blame is rarely self-blame. Rather, it is blame of others – the government, the police, the Pope, the bishop, the priests and deacons, the parish council, the youth, the schools... the list is endless.

As the community of the Church, our vocation is different. The “blame game” is nowhere to be found in the Good News of Jesus Christ. Instead, as brothers and sisters of the Lord, our calling is one of [virtuous](#) living. It includes genuine devotion to God and our Catholic tradition. Living virtuous lives by no means places us over or above others. It does however; allow the power of the Holy Spirit to work through us so that others might meet Christ in us and through this encounter, they will know the love and mercy of God. There is no room for blame in this way of living.

I would like to propose to you that this call, this vocation, is common to all the baptised. It is our commission to be evangelists of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Evangelists are called to share Christ with others. The next step is to acknowledge that we belong to an evangelising community. Pope Francis reminds us that an evangelising community gets involved in people’s lives and stands by people every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy the journey. (*cf The Joy of the Gospel*, 24) This is an essential part of our mission and will cause us to have a daily concern to spread the love and goodness of God. It can be challenging work; however, it is not without its rewards. The desire to share our Christian joy is itself a gift from God who has taken the initiative of loving us first.



This week, I encourage you to spend some quiet time in prayer and contemplation with the Lord. Discover and re-discover what God's saving love has done and is doing in your life. Then, go out and proclaim that love as a witness to the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ.

May the love, the joy, and the peace of Christ be with you.

+Anthony