

On Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup> at 7.15 a.m., I was in the shower. By 9.45, the time of the shooting at Norris Hall, I was at Church beginning another week. The internet alerted me to the massacre at Virginia Tech.

“Damn. It has happened again,” I thought.

We were all brutally attacked by a mad man. Those who died or were wounded were on the campus of Virginia Tech. I hold each of them and their families and friends in my heart as I do the entire Virginia Tech community. But make no mistake, every man, woman, and child in America was also a victim of this heinous and selfish act.

While my sadness runs thick, my patience runs thin. In my lifetime what happened on Monday has happened too many times. And, it will happen again. You know the litany of senseless killings as well as I do. People of renown and anonymous students gunned down. When will we stop? When will we wake up from this on-going nightmare?

What I have to say is personal. You may agree. You may disagree. First and foremost, I speak as a child of God. But I also speak as an American and as a concerned citizen. The slaughter of 32 innocent people is a moral issue. How we conduct ourselves as a society is a reflection of our values and morals.

Out of necessity, many 18<sup>th</sup> century people owned and used guns as an integral part of everyday life. For the most part, those guns put food on the table. Then, at a time when the British oppressed the people of this land, a revolution was fought to bring freedom and independence. It was a good thing. To prevail, American colonists fought first with the pen and then with guns.

Afterwards, the best and wisest crafted our Constitution, which continues to guide us. Along the way, that document has changed and courts have parsed meaning from the words like preachers do with Scripture. We have passed Amendments and we have repealed Amendments.

Reasonable people can speak to different sides of the gun issue. Nobody, however, can disagree that the purpose of the Second Amendment is to provide for “a well-regulated Militia.” That is exactly what the words say. The reason was based on the recent experience of those writing the document. The necessity for “a well-regulated Militia” is not a bad idea. And so, in its wisdom, the government of these United States has created both a standing military and “a well-regulated Militia.” The latter, I believe, fulfills the spirit and letter of the Second Amendment. We call it the National Guard.

Although the privilege of owning a sporting gun is not unreasonable, the necessity for individuals to bear arms in anticipation of joining a defensive militia no longer exists.

The easy availability of guns—the many of which are designed as killing machines or to be concealed—couples with a culture of violence blasted through the airwaves—a condition conspicuously absent when the Constitution's Second Amendment was considered.

I shudder to think how the framers of our liberties would react to the wonton violence so prevalent in our modern society because of Second Amendment protection. The framers were not violent men. But please, I'm not clueless. I know the argument that banning guns will mean only criminals have guns. I understand that it's not guns that kill, but people. Hum. Somehow I have trouble disconnecting these thoughts. It's true, most killings in the United States involve people ... and guns.

And who is responsible for this sad state of affairs? We all are. You and I! We condone violence by our inaction. We condone guns in our society by our inaction. We do not have the will to stand and fight for moral sanity.

From time to time I make the following suggestion as a way to address the gun issue. Most who hear my plan say they will vote for me as the next President even though I'm not interested in running. My idea is simple, Constitutional, and practical.

I think everybody—man, woman, and child—should be required to have and carry a gun—a BIG gun—at all times. If you're in public without your gun, you're subject to a fine or jail. Now before you think I'm crazy, hear me out. This plan would satisfy every single one of those who stand unflinchingly on their Second Amendment rights as they understand them, to wit: "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

The key to my idea, however, is that bullets would be banned. No bullets! No bullets would be available to anybody except the military, the police, and people who had a *high* level of ATF bullet-use clearance. Like, maybe a quail hunter could get four 12 gauge shotgun shells for a Saturday afternoon. But, he or she would have to return the un-used shells after the hunt as well as the spent shell casings. Likewise the deer and squirrel hunters. (Ever eaten squirrel? It's not bad.) And I would expect the ATF to enforce the bullet ban with huge penalties for anybody caught with or using bullets illegally. *Please note*, the Second Amendment says nothing—nada, zero, zip—about bullets.

These remarks about guns, killing, and violence in general are in the context of the outrage, sadness, and frustration we all feel following another murderous rampage by a crazed human being. They also come from my passionate belief that we are challenged AGAIN to look for new ways to achieve a civilized society.

I don't much like that phrase "What would Jesus do?" but that's exactly what I'm wondering right now? How, in the name of Christ, can any of us imagine that a Jesus transported to April 2007 would go on CNN and say, "Yeah, I think things in the U.S. are going great and gun ownership is a big plus to your program."

The Jesus of the Gospels stands over against violence and the ability of some people to oppress others. The Jesus of the Gospels abhors violence and don't you think he would over-turn the cameras in our movie and TV studios in protest and to protect our children? The Jesus of the Gospels has the courage to say what needs to be said and then to stand on the high moral ground of life, not death.

Do you remember how big-time blind Paul got when he went to Damascus to persecute those 'heretical fools' following *The Way*. He was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9). Phew. Thank God Paul didn't have easy access to guns.

Paul went blind, blind to what he was doing and what he supposedly stood for. For Paul, when he opened his eyes after Ananais laid his hands on him, everything changed. He awoke and saw things with new eyes. Please, don't take that lesson lightly. Paul abandoned his old path and chose a new path, the path to life, compassion, forgiveness, justice, and love. He put violence behind him.

I cannot stand to think that the innocents who died last Monday will have died for nothing. How can we let their sacrifice not teach us and change us? Now is the time to turn our moral outrage into a constructive national dialogue about guns and violence in our society. Few other countries live with the level of violence found daily in the United States, except maybe Iraq. But hey, didn't we exported it there? Recent talk about making college campuses safer seems to focus on sirens, email, and cell phone alerts, and spotting the crazies before they buy their guns. Get a grip. The problem is guns and easy access to them.

Not to have the will to engage these difficult and challenging issues is to invite more of the same. Next time—and there will be a next time—will it be your children or grandchildren in the school yard or at the mall?