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“To thine own self be true....”

This former high school math teacher doesn't remember the source of this exhortation—"To thine own self be true—but she agrees that it is profoundly true.

The truth of it bears on us as individuals of whatever age, as well as groups and societies as a whole.

The latter applications have been sharpened for me by both reports of U.S. abuses of persons we have taken captive and by work on prison ministry policy and service in Kentucky. This sharpened understanding has led to prayer at the 7th Station in "The Way of the Cross" prayer—where Jesus falls the second time.

At that 7th Station I have for some years been praying for prisoners and all persons who are weak in a sense of self-worth, a root cause of troubled living, as teachers soon learn. My prayer: that their hearts be softened and that some among us find a way to help them see their inherent dignity and lovability, whatever their actions.

With growing humility I remember calling one of our Sisters in California some years back (at 6 am her time...! Don't imitate that!) on some citizen advocacy matter. At one point in the conversation, with some frustration, I referred to one of our legislators with a term about the lifestyle of his parents. Sister gently yet firmly brought me up short about my language (and thus my attitude). A conversion moment for me.

Of late my prayerful attention has been extended to police, military police, and all corrections and legal personnel. My prayer becomes for this latter group: Let us not forget who we are and at root who the persons in our charge ARE—whatever they DO. We are all created by God, loved by God, redeemed by God. Life's task is to realize and accept that love AND act accordingly! Or, put another way, sidestep the trap of

being co-opted into what we are condemning while we strive to restrain harmful actions—and keep our eyes on our goal to help persons change for the better and make restitution for harm done.

Beyond the Guantanamo and other prison abuses, the recent execution of Mr. Hussein evokes a lot of reflections in this vein. There is every evidence that Mr. Hussein did and led horrible crimes against humanity. Denigrating his inherent human dignity though contributes to keeping the violence going—and his execution has seen such, sorry to say, if not unforeseen.

The way we treated him can indicate something troublesome about us.

Such likewise gets at my growing discomfort with capital punishment/death penalty (adding to my provoked awareness that there are no millionaires on any death row in the U.S.). How can vengeful people be acting in God's Spirit?

Then there is the way we as a nation see ourselves in the global community of nations. In our professed and actualized living our principles, wouldn't we be wise and strive to work with that mindset in other national, ethnic and racial groups? We have seen that disregard of cultural sensitivities has increased the harm done persons in our captivity by some of our military personnel and national leaders.

So let us take great care to be true to ourselves as we strive to fully live our treasured, professed values.

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