

## Things are getting hot!

Now you have to understand: I am from snow country. In many ways, I am like the penguins which festoon my office: not only does my black-and-white Dominican habit make me look like them, but my natural habitat is likewise much like theirs. If given the choice, I would choose snow over summer hands down! Yet, in the midst of an infernal summer, visions of snow are a distant dream: I and everyone else sit and swelter. It comes as no surprise to me that the tortures of hell are described in terms of fire and heat.

Even more like hell than the elevated temperatures is the behavior which those temperatures produce. “Hot under the collar” refers not to physical discomfort and irritation, but instead to the emotional irritation so often manifested in this season. When it is difficult enough for us to stand living in our own burning skin, it becomes all the more difficult for us to indulge someone or something which gets “under our skin”. Is it coincidental that riots and revolutions so often take place in the summer? I think not! Speaking of which, wasn’t it in August that Ukraine freed itself from the Soviet chains whose chafing had become unbearable?

In this summer of 2010, there is indeed a lot of chafing. Everybody seems “hot under the collar”. Public discourse is anything but civil, as volume is seemingly valued over virtue: people with fire in their eyes scream at one another, and “debate” produces “more heat than light”, thus “raising the temperature” even more. Polarization is the name of the game - in the nation, in the Church, in the world at large: we divide up into warring camps more concerned with destroying our “enemy” than with seeking the common good. And, oh, doesn’t our righteous indignation make us feel powerful as we pummel our opponent into submission – all the while unwittingly trampling our own interests in the process! Nero fiddled while Rome burned; aren’t we doing the same? My mother would have referred to this as “cutting off your nose to spite your face”.

Ideology divides, Gospel unites. Gospel means “Good News” – Good News for all! If it isn’t good news for everyone, it’s not the Gospel of Jesus Christ – pretenses notwithstanding. The Gospel is the foundation of the Church, which is to be a community of faith where God’s love is available to all – not just to those who love us, to those who agree with us, or to those who can offer us something in return for our love or agreement. We unworthy recipients need to share God’s love as freely as it has been shared with us. This divine love needs to be lived out in the Church in such a convincing way that others are drawn to it, marveling “See how the Christians love one another!”

Such is the Church that Christ established, the Church which has come down to us over the generations. Jesus said of this Church that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” So where is the heat coming from? Could it be that, despite what we say in the “our Father”, we are more concerned with our stubbornly selfish and divisive ways than with God’s will? As Peter, Paul, and Mary used to sing, “When will they ever learn?”

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op