UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

University Chaplain

BE AFRAID . . . . NOT!

Paraskevidekatriaphobia. That word should be enough to strike fear into the hearts of mortals! It is, of course, the technical term for "Fear of Friday the 13th". Perhaps less fear-producing is *Triskaidekaphobia* or "Friday 13th Fear". Most of us, it appears however, are not overly concerned with the date/day. According to a statistic I heard on the radio this morning, 3 out of 5 Americans won't pay much attention to it at all.

Great! 60% of us aren't particularly worried about Fridays that happen to be the 13th day of the month. But . . . 40% of us are! That, too me, is a bit horrifying. I must say, that if folks reading this are part of the 40%, I have my own sets of fears that may not have much grounding in reality. It's just that Fridays the 13th are not included. But I do understand the phenomenon! And it amazes me how big of a deal, given the percentages, we make of this calendrical occurrence. (For those of you for whom this IS a problem, take comfort that in 2010, there will only be ONE Friday the 13th, after THREE in 2009!) Fear is obviously big--and profitable--business! According to Wikipedia, "Friday the 13th is an American horror franchise that consists of twelve slasher films, a television show, novels, comic books, and tie-in merchandise." They don't keep making the movies or the merchandise if it isn't being sold!

I've been musing on "fear" for the last week or so, as I've read (and heard) the commentary on the tragedy at Ft. Hood. How quick the fear-mongers were to take up the cry about clamping down on Islamic activity in the US, or the danger of having Muslims in the American military (there was a letter to the editor in this morning's *Denver Post* to that effect). The report this morning that several mosques and a sky-scraper are going to be seized by the government because of alleged ties to the Iranian government only adds to the culture of fear that a significant percentage of the American public occupies. I'm not qualified to comment on the accuracy of the government's claims about the Iranian connections; the intelligence may be entirely iron-clad. But why release that news now, when the nation is reeling from a tragedy resulting from the actions of one very disturbed individual. Looking back at other tragedies (Va Tech, Oklahoma City, etc.), were similar "revelations" made that related to the religious background of the perpetrators of those? And why have we not seen much (if any) national reporting of the major US Islamic groups' condemnation of Major Hasan's actions? What is to be gained by the continual massaging of our national fear-response? There is muck being raked, clearly. And we have to wonder who benefits from the resulting pile?

Folks out there want to play on our fears. Their reasons for doing that may be many and various. But I wonder what would happen if we simply said "No. I'm not going to buy into that. You're talking about real human beings, people I am going to choose to try to respond to with understanding first, not with hatred first." Hmm. If we did that, we'd probably be called crazy.

A friend of mine is an military reservist and Episcopal priest in Killeen, TX, and serves the Ft. Hood community. He posted to his Facebook status on November 7th: "I want to thank everyone for their prayers for us at Ft. Hood. While words can never capture the depth of pain, the assurance that we are not alone in this provides hope and sustains the weary soul. Please continue to pray for us, especially for those of us who provide care to the hurting. Please remember, too, Maj Hasan, for he needs our prayers also." I was very struck by his last sentence. George (my friend) understands. We cannot respond to violence with fear or reciprocal violence. Prayer may not be the only answer, but it's clearly one of the best places to start.

Blessings,
Gary

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