"Come Back to Me"

By Chaplain Norbert Karava

One of the more colorful characters on the stage of the Great Italian Renaissance was Girolamo Savonarola, born in 1452 in Ferrara, Italy. He became a Dominican friar and also became one of the most compelling visionary-preachers of the entire Renaissance, and was immortalized by Dante in the Divine Comedy. He was and is popularly perceived as the veritable incarnation of a dour, morbid austerity in which even the slightest pleasure was suspect of sin, and is best remembered for the Bonfire of the Vanities in the Piazza della Signoria during the pre-lenten carnival of 1497, in which numerous works of art, books, to say nothing of jewelry, wigs, girdles, hair combs and other accoutrements of elegance went up in a flame that was to claim a permanent place in the western cultural memory and imagination.

Yet one of the greatest surprises that emerge from his treatises and sermons on repentance is the claim that the first effect of repentance is joy.

Sack cloths and ashes, fastings and flagellations, what could this possibly have to do with joy?

Perhaps one of the sources of this perplexity is the confusion of repentance with punishment. All repentance involves punishment, but not all punishments are repentance: Punishment entails the infliction of some evil either as a deterrent or retribution for crime committed. Repentance, on the other hand, while usually involving punishment, is not so much focused on the crime committed but the criminal himself, namely, his recovery and restoration. At the very outset, the possibility of repentance is one of the most and hope-laden readings of man: It implies that, in spite of his all-too-morbid and undeniably dismal and depressingly factual track record of failure, betrayal, self-destructiveness and self-centered foolishness that (1), there is yet remaining an underlying value in him worth rescuing, (2), someone wants to rescue him, (3) and therefore, he is capable of being rescued. At least for those who have weathered the brunt of the no-kidding reality of man, and whose sober assessment of our species has grown beyond of the 1965-vintage silly strains of "Man of La Mancha" (something about dreaming the impossible dream), for example, people in law enforcement, case workers, missionaries, border guards, public defenders, and the like, this is cause of joy indeed: Hope for man that can withstand a truly honest assessment of his moral performance? Could it really be? It is under these three headings that religion comes to the succor of man, stuttering under the intolerable embarrassment of his sins exposed:

(1) One of the recurring dimensions of religious experience is the sense of the divine as emerging from out of a depth of the human heart beyond our own ability ruin or deface. As created "in the image and likeness of God," we, the created, cannot uncreate ourselves or recreate ourselves into something other than what the Creator has created us to be. And so, even though we can deface ourselves and scribble all manner of foul graffiti on the surface our souls, we cannot alter or deface ourselves in our first moment of existence, as God created us, in his image and likeness. Repentance means the invitation and possibility of returning to who and what we are in the first moment of ourselves endowed with the breath of life and existence.

(2) When we have this sense of the divine emerging out from under the compost pile of our hearts as the part of us that has survived all our malfeasance and self-destructive behavior, the wonderful and most true part of ourselves that we cannot undo, we sense and realize that we are being taken by the hand and led through a labyrinth of innumerable excuses, rationalizations, and biases that, on our own, we could never either be able to see through, or have the courage to go through.

(3) Which brings us to the third heading, i.e., man as capable of being rescued: Of ourselves, not only would we never be able to lift ourselves up from under the compost pile of what we think our life is, but, more importantly, we would never know that there was anything else to our lives… but this compost pile or our mediocrity, lovelessness and shame. Of all the necessities that allow man to discover the existence of the Most Gracious One, of him who has an undeniable claim to the ownership of the human heart, yet humbly stands without, and knocks at its door as its most humble guest, there is the necessity of forgiveness.

Of all the needs we experience, this is the need that we are least able to fill. Our inability to forgive ourselves, individually and collectively, is more inexorable than gravity itself. One of the chief reasons that religion is the abiding companion of man is that without the forgiveness of the Forgiver not of this world, we are mired in our own individual and collective self-condemnation, experienced and manifested as inadequacy, insecurity, negative self-image, self-destructiveness and shame.

Look in the mirror long as you will… and you will not be able to forgive it, even though you may wink at what appears to be the handsome devil on the other side. The experience of forgiveness is something on the order of a recreation, the impossible somehow come true.

Repentance is the story of man as narrated by his creator, who on the one spares no detail in the excruciatingly truthful expose of his wayward creature, yet, whose faithfulness cannot be undone by any mere mortal malice.

It is then, when in all our cleverness, we have painted ourselves into the corner of our own futility and desperation that we can discover what makes repentance, and there life, possible: Concerning ourselves, we do not have the final word. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made whiter than snow." Even though our faces may be irrigated by hot and profuse tears, the smile gives it away; these are tears of inexpressible joy.

Recently at the courthouse

From senior trial counsel, RLSO Japan

The following cases were recently heard at courts-martial in Navy Region Japan:

At a General Court-Martial, an E-3 was found guilty of murder (act inherently dangerous to another). The E-3 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-1, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, confinement for 21 years and a Dishonorable Discharge. A pretrial agreement in the case limits confinement to 15 years.

At a General Court-Martial, an E-3 was found guilty of false official statements. The E-3 received 89 days confinement.

At a General Court-Martial, an E-3 was found guilty of assault consummated by a battery. The E-3 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-1, forfeiture of $1,379.00 for a period of three months and three months confinement.

At a General Court-Martial, an E-5 was found guilty of receipt and possession of child pornography. The E-5 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-1, total forfeitures of all pay and allowances, confinement for seven years, and a Dishonorable Discharge. A pretrial agreement in the case limits confinement to 34 months and the discharge to a Bad Conduct Discharge.

Navy adopts 'Domino Strategy on How to Drink Responsibly'

From Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

MILLINGTON, Tenn. – Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention (NADAP) Office launched the "Domino Strategy on How to Drink Responsibly" campaign, officials said Feb. 29.

"This social marketing campaign encourages Sailors to pay attention to the size, content and amount of alcohol they consume each time they drink," said Dorice Favorite, director, Navy Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention. "The strategy recommends that Sailors follow responsible drinking guidelines defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services."

Those guidelines advocate a 0-1-2 approach. Zero drinks for people who are under 21, operating any type of vehicle, pregnant, trying to become pregnant or breastfeeding, recovering alcoholics or chemically dependent, and using certain medications.

No more than one standard drink per day for women and no more than two standard drinks per day for men.

The campaign is designed to help people who drink alcohol, reduce their risk of harming themselves or others.

The strategy provides specific information that enables people to compare their individual drinking pattern against a clear set of low-risk guidelines.

The Domino Strategy does not replace current prevention programs; it adds depth to already existing initiatives, according to Favorite.

The messages of the Domino Strategy are divided into three phases. The first phase asks the question "Do you count?", helping Sailors make the connection between counting drinks and reducing personal risk.

The second and third phase educate Sailors on what constitutes a "standard drink" and encourages Sailors to pay attention to the content of their drink by asking "How big is it?" and "What's inside?"

"We're not telling people not to drink if they are of age to drink but we want them to drink responsibly. Substance abuse reduces a command's ability to accomplish its mission and is inconsistent with Navy core values," said Favorite.

Alcohol and drug abuse can seriously damage an individual's physical and mental health, jeopardize their safety and the safety of others, can lead to criminal prosecution, and can result in unfavorable separation from naval service.

The campaign will include posters, outdoor banners, table tents, pamphlets, and TV/Radio public service announcements. All materials are available at no cost to all Navy commands for ordering through the Navy Logistics Library. Supply personnel may order them via https://nll1.ahf.nmci.navy.mil (for NMCI computers) or http://www.navsup.navy.mil/navsup (if NMCI is not available).

For more news from NADAP, visit www.npc.navy.mil/support/nadap.