

## 2nd Sunday of Advent

Cycle A

December 5, 2010

St. Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Imagine this scene. On a July day, Tom gets home from work about 6pm. His wife Carol is already home and he immediately says: *"I've got to get ready to meet Bob for tennis at 7."* Carol snaps back: *"You said you were going to mow the lawn this evening."* There is a chill in the air, and Tom without any response races to get out the lawn mower and he cuts the lawn in record time. Tom then runs into the house to change into his tennis clothes and Carol says: *"Aren't you going to edge?"* Tom: *"It doesn't need edging."* Carol: *"I think it does."* Tom: *"Look, no one will notice the difference."* Carol: *"You said you were going to mow and that includes edging."* Tom: *"No it doesn't. Mowing means mowing and edging means edging."* Carol: *"Well, I guess I'll edge then."* Tom: *"No! I'll do it when I get home."* Tom angrily leaves for tennis with an icy silence between them. He gets home after dark and Carol is there. *"Well, are you going to edge?"* and on it goes. The conflict continues for two days.

About a year ago, I read this book – *The Anatomy of Peace*. One of the authors tells this true story on himself. The subtitle is: *Resolving the Heart of Conflict*. And that is precisely what *The Anatomy of Peace* is all about. The insights here can relate to family relationships, to work settings, and even to relations between countries, cultures, and races. The same dynamics operate on all levels of conflict. I have extracted three insights for our reflection this morning.

First, the heart of most conflict is treating others as objects. In the story, Tom is not alert to Carol – to her thoughts or feelings about his commitment to mow the lawn. He is treating her as an object, an obstacle to his playing tennis. And what happens here is pretty typical. When we come across to another person in that way, when we treat the other as an object, we invite that person to respond in the same way. So Carol just gets focused on getting the lawn cut. Maybe she really needs some relief from all the stress in her life and Tom is the means to that end. So Carol in turn treats Tom as an object. And there lies the heart of conflict. They are treating each other as objects, as things. That is the core behavior or dynamic underneath most conflict.

This takes me to a second and related insight. When we treat each other as objects, we may tend to demonize the other person. We can see a spouse or teenager or anyone as all bad or all wrong and we might even recite the list of their deficiencies to a third party. We can also do this demonizing and stereotyping with whole groups of people: whites with blacks and vice versa, Christians with Muslims and vice versa, and on it goes. The demonizing flows from treating each other as objects and it leads to conflict.

The third insight is how to avoid treating others as objects and how to avoid conflict. One simple sentence: Treat others as persons. Treat others as persons. We need to adopt the mindset that others are human being like ourselves, with needs, feelings, dreams, hurts, and problems much like our own. We are to see each other and all others as persons like ourselves. To do this, we have to make relationship primary and this involves a number of things. It means listening, really taking in the words and life experience of the other and putting ourselves in the position of the other. It means expressing myself in a respectful way without bashing or putting down the other person. It involves asking: What are this person's challenges, burdens, hopes, whatever? What have I done to add to this person's burden or relieve it? What am I feeling I should do and what can I do to assist? This approach will help to bridge the gap between subject and object and create more of a oneness between two persons or even between two groups of people. It will help to avoid conflict or get out of it.

Maybe working on treating others as persons is our response to the calling of John the Baptist this Advent. Maybe these insights can help us to avoid or resolve conflict. Maybe they can help us experience more of the peace that Isaiah envisions and that the Lord wants for us.