

We are products of our pasts 9-27-15 (Lindsay)

My grandmother was born in 1894. She had three children, the eldest was my mother born in 1920. She and my grandfather raised their family on a farm south of Ft Worth obviously during the Great Depression. Simple math tells us that she was in her early 40's during the hardest years in the mid '30s. She died in 1985. I give you this preliminary information so that this little story I'm about to tell you will make sense.

When I was a boy, from 8 to about 16 years old I would spend a lot of time at her house. During the summer it was hot in her house. Why? Because she hated running the swamp cooler because it used electricity and electricity cost money. One day my uncles showed up at her house with a brand new window unit AC. They spent half the day installing it. My uncle gave strict instructions to her to use the AC to cool her room where she stayed. Do you think she paid him any mind? No, she did not. All she could think about was how much the electricity cost when it was running. I'll never forget the time my uncle and I went to see her on a hot Sunday afternoon. She was in her room and it was stifling. It was so hot it was unbearable. It had to be in the 90's in her room. My uncle lost his temper with her. "Mother, do you realize I could go to jail for abuse of the elderly if you died in this room? Run the air conditioner!" She said, "Oh, honey it's so expensive I don't like running it." He

told her, "Never mind about the electric bill. The bill comes to me and this little window unit doesn't cost five dollars a month. Please run the air conditioner!" This drove him crazy because he knew as soon as we left she would go turn it off. I'm sure many of us can tell stories like this. The folks that were young adults during the Depression are all gone now and I say, 'God bless them'. They went through so much so that we could have what we have.

There is a reason why I tell this story. My grandmother was a product of her times. She was so scarred by the Great Depression that it was difficult for her to spend money the rest of her life. She lived in mortal fear that the Depression would come back and this haunted her until she died.

We are all products of our past. How we think, how we feel, how we relate, how we talk everything is colored by our experiences in life. It is part and parcel of being a human being. Aristotle said that 'Man is a political animal'. Herman Melville said in Moby Dick, 'Man is a money making animal'. What they are each saying in their own way is that essentially we are all social animals, being shaped and molded by our experiences and by the people and times in which we live. My father's generation, that fought WWII were shaped in an astonishing way by an obscure German corporal named Adolf Hitler. How different would have millions of lives been if Hitler had never lived!

We are taught by the Church that our Lord was fully God and fully man. He wasn't made God or deified or promoted to divinity because He lived such a virtuous life. No, He was God from the beginning and became man. And He was a man that lived at a certain time, in a certain place with a certain point of view shaped by the times He lived in.

Jesus spoke Aramaic. He certainly spoke Hebrew and maybe Latin, we don't know. He most probably thought in Aramaic. Aramaic is a Semitic language that employs the use of exaggeration, metaphor and extravagant similes. It is part and parcel of the Semitic mindset. We, on the other hand speak English. We are taught that in writing good English to use short, pithy phrases. Say what you mean and mean what you say and act as if words cost money. George Orwell, in his essay 'Politics and the English language' says when writing in English, 'if you can cut a word out, always cut it out.' We make fun of politicians that use a lot of gobbledygook to mask what they are saying so they can deny later that they said what they said.

This is not true of Aramaic, and so it is not true of what Jesus says. Jesus tells us, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off." "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off." And again, "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out." Do you think that Jesus really meant, literally that we should go around with meat cleavers and forks so that we could more handily chop off

hands and feet and pluck out our eyes when we sin? No, and He would be astonished that anyone would be so silly as to believe this. The point is that He took sin very, very seriously and so should we. The crowd that heard these words when He first spoke them would have understood what He meant very clearly. Why? Because they were first century Palestinian Jews just like Jesus was. When we read the gospels and try to make sense of Jesus' preaching we must be sure we don't transfer a speech made 2000 years ago into our times without understanding the time and place in which the speech was made. This is fatal to a true understanding of the gospel message. We wind up reading the New Testament with a lack of maturity that leads us down a wrong path.

This is a reason why we need a Magisterium, an infallible Church to guide us. This is one reason why I became Catholic, because without the Church, the one, true Catholic and apostolic Church then religion descends into chaos, a matter of mere opinion. One person's judgment is just as good as another's. It would be like playing football with no rules and no referee. We don't always agree with the ref, but without the ref where would we be?

A good exercise is to open up the Catechism of the Catholic Church and to read at random. This is the rule book of the Church and contains more

riches than any person can absorb in a lifetime. Look in the index at the back and read about topics that strike your interest. You will be amazed.

Being a Catholic is a great adventure, a wonderful journey on the way to a glorious destination, eternity with God.