

## Being a Christian in today's world 7-12-15 (Lindsay)

Once when I was working on the north slope of Alaska, we were riding out to our location. It was winter. I forget what month it was, but it was cold and windy. We were startled when we saw a wolf silhouetted on a small hill probably about a quarter mile away. Wolves weren't supposed to range that far north, but there he (or she) was, big as life. Back to that wolf in a minute.

In Tok, Alaska there is a museum that has the state records for various Alaskan animals taken with a bow and arrow. If you are ever up there and are in Tok, it isn't optional, you must go to this museum. The timber wolf they have in there is stuffed, of course. But it will give you the willies to think about meeting him in the woods because he is on all fours and his eyes are level with mine. Now, I know I'm not a tall guy, but think about a wolf whose eyes are five feet five inches above the ground while on all fours.

We were startled to see that wolf on the North Slope, because it was hard to imagine an animal that tough. It was way too far north of its natural territory. It gave us pause, because we worked outside and the idea of meeting a very hungry wolf wasn't an idea any of us savored. All my fellow workers were pretty tough oilfield guys, but it was a sobering thought even for them.

Jesus has been talking about commissioning his disciples the last few days in our gospel readings. He said on Thursday, "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves." It's easy to glide over this business of a sheep in the midst of wolves, but it is a serious reality to think that Jesus means that WE are the sheep. Of course, a sheep has no shot at all up against a wolf or even worse, wolves. But notice what our Lord says immediately following. "Be shrewd as serpents and simple as doves." Being compared to a snake is almost as bad as being compared to a sheep. If we say of someone, 'He's a snake'. it's not intended as a compliment. It means someone who is capable of double dealing, of treachery. But then our Lord says we are to be simple as doves at the same time we are to be like snakes. What in the world does this mean? How can we do this impossible thing? I think Jesus is reminding us that God has given us intelligence and common sense. We are expected to use both. But we aren't to use them like the metaphorical snake. We are to use them like a dove, innocent in an evil, sinful world. But aware and smart.

The history of the Church is endlessly fascinating because of the balancing act the Popes and bishops have had to perform to carry out Jesus' command. Has the Church always gotten it exactly right? Heavens, no! Oftentimes the popes have acted too much like a prince or a king and fallen

into the trap of being just another worldly leader. But for hundreds of years the Vatican has had the most sophisticated diplomatic corps on earth. They have an intelligence network that is the envy of the world. And for the vast majority of the time, they have worked for good.

A case in point I mentioned in passing the other day is the case of Pope Pius X who was pope at the beginning of WWI. He became melancholy when he realized that the war was inevitable and died probably of a broken heart. We all know the terrible history of Europe after his death through WWI and then WWII, when for all intents and purposes Europe and world came close to committing suicide. But the Church worked tirelessly through diplomacy and the hierarchy to try and prevent both wars.

Pope John Paul II was instrumental in the downfall of communism in Europe. Without him it probably wouldn't have happened. Did he do it through power as defined by armies and navies and armaments? No, he had none of those things. But he did have the Holy Spirit. And an outstanding intelligence. He was a serpent and a dove, just as Jesus commanded. And look what he accomplished!

It is easy and fatally attractive to give in to the temptation to despair in these times we live in. Don't do it! Turn off the television and the radio. Read a

book instead, any book that will broaden your mind so that you may understand that the Holy Spirit is in the world, He still guides the Church, Jesus is still Lord, priest, prophet and King and we will be alright in the end.