



*Pastor's Pen*



*April 7, 2019*

- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

## THE DIATRIBE

Karl Keating founded Catholic Answers, a catechetical and apologetics group based in San Diego, to help Catholics learn the content of their faith and help them defend teachings from misunderstanding and outright attack. It's a good thing to be prepared to answer questions. Most of the time when people ask, we can assume an honest sense of curiosity. I get it all the time. But we also know that sometimes those questions are not meant to engage in honest dialogue. They are meant to attack. Sometimes those attacks come in the form of absolutely ridiculous interpretations of Catholic belief and outright misrepresentations of them. Many of us probably have family who have left the Church. Perhaps they believe they know more about the Church's teachings than we do because of what they have learned from some groups who spread those misunderstandings and errors.

Keating was criticized early on in his mission for engaging in debate among rabidly anti-Catholic zealots who spewed absurdities that few if any charitable and clear-thinking people would ever believe. Critics thought it was a waste of time and energy to engage what they would call "crazies" when other more important things could be done in catechesis. Keating would not dispute the absurdity of the claims, but he insisted he needed to engage them precisely because if the most absurd claims were not addressed, the equally incorrect, but far less absurd sounding claims, became more believable.

At All Saints, we dealt with the absurdity of rabid anti-Catholic bigotry when cars at our 9:00 Mass on March 24 were leafleted with a lengthy anonymous letter left by someone claiming allegiance to Seventh Day Adventists. St. Michael's in Farmington was leafleted with the same material on the same day.

We asked people to discard it properly, and I think most did. Some took it more charitably than I did. Some were angrier than I was. What the people responsible did was at a minimum rude, and probably more serious. Attacking another's faith while in worship is disrespectful, and the act of leafleting without permission on private property is illegal for a reason.

The content of the letter included distortions of Scripture, misstatements of history, and complete misunderstandings of Catholic teaching. It was left anonymously, which is both uncharitable and cowardly. Offering critique and feigning an attempt to engage in debate in an anonymous capacity is inappropriate in any setting. I wish I could say this is the only time this happens, but we occasionally get anonymous communication in our office from people claiming to be parishioners, but we obviously can't verify that without a name. In most cases, like our leafleted letter, the communication is laced with anger, inaccuracies, and misunderstandings that cannot be corrected because the person refuses to engage the issue or even leave a name. No matter the issue, anonymous communication is no way to engage people on any issue. It is simply uncharitable.

The letter left on our cars, was probably limited because two parishioners saw them doing it and then they took off when they were seen, is an example of anti-Catholic bigotry and uncharitable behavior unbecoming of anyone calling themselves a follower of the revealed God or a Disciple of Jesus Christ. Like Karl Keating's early critics, I realize these are outliers on the spectrum of humanity and religious people. We can never forget that. I think most of us enjoy faithful and positive relationships with people we have religious or other differences with. It is necessary for basic survival in a pluralistic world, religiously and otherwise.

We should be grateful that what we experienced last week is the exception and not the norm. But we make a mistake if we simply ignore it and pretend bigotry will go away without being addressed. The anonymous attack makes it impossible for us to engage anyone on this action, and we need to be careful to not assume all Seventh Day Adventists adhere to such behavior. It is highly unlikely that this was sponsored by or endorsed by anyone with responsibility in the Seventh Day Adventist church.

In a grim way, it reminds us that bigotry and misunderstanding are real and present. It also reminds us of the importance of us knowing our faith, so we don't fall to someone else telling us what we believe or don't believe. As we advance toward Holy Week and Easter, we also know that Jesus Himself was treated in the same way.