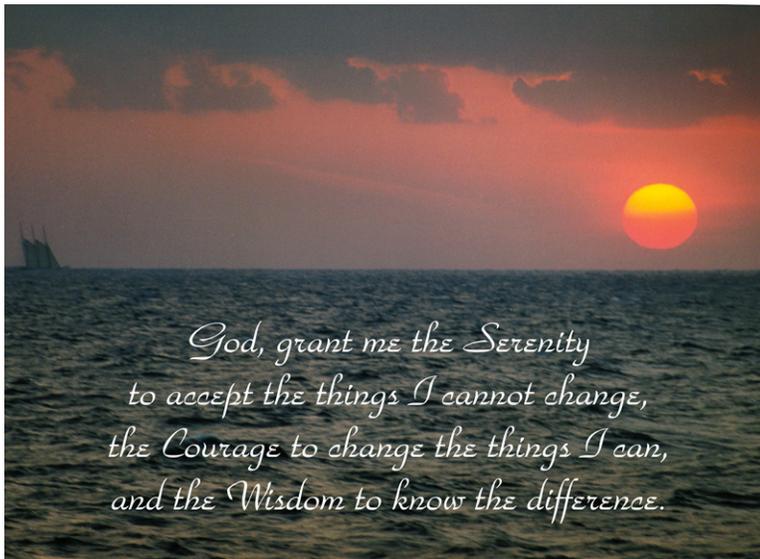


## Control - Who Has It & Who Doesn't?

Given recent events (i.e. June-July 2016) it is worth asking, "Who really is in control?" You might want to ask, "Control of what?" That is a fair question, and the answer at first seems to be quite simple: "Anything!"

Almost anywhere I look there is a problem of control. Sometimes it is visible in a relationship. One person gets his or her way in so many social and private situations that observers realize, even if the two people don't, that one of the two is more in charge of what happens than the other. Sometimes it is happening in what is supposed to be a loving relationship. Others times relationships are more superficial and are based on providing a service, such as an employee and an employer. We see control issues played out in every kind of relationship from spousal abuse and child abuse to those who betray the trust of their students or their employers. We also have noticed it in the ongoing reality that women with skills and knowledge equivalent to men are paid significantly less and have less access to the top corporate jobs than men.

Control is an ongoing issue in government. Sometimes it is visible because whoever is in control and does not want attention focused on their hospital, their military base, their procurement procedures or the efficiency of their staff (think VA hospitals and how long veterans have had to wait for medical care) tries to limit if not control the flow of information. If they can't control the information, then they may try to "Spin" the news so that it does the least damage to the government and to them.



Exercising control over the availability as well as the use or misuse of various substances is a significant control problem in America. We spend huge amounts of money trying to prevent illegal drugs from entering our country. Yes, the various governmental agencies manage to capture sizable quantities of them, but it would be an exaggeration to claim that our government "controlled" the drug trade. It would be even more difficult to agree that our various layers of government have "control" over how much alcohol or other drugs we consume.

What about the Church? Do we have control issues? (Hint: They are sometime disguised by labeling them as authority issues.) So, yes, the Church in general has control problems. Some of them are well beyond our ability to influence, much less control. Others are not. The debate over whether the Bible is to be read as the literal and inspired Word of God is, at heart, a debate over who is in control of interpreting the meaning of the Bible. If the Bible is the Word of God, then it may be that only the clergy and those who teach them should control what the people of the Church learn about God and God's intervention in our history. Prior to printing presses making Bible easily available that was the reality. Conversely, if the person reading the Bible is able through God's grace to interpret the Scriptures themselves, then each person has significant "control" over what the Biblical texts mean to them.

Control shows up in almost every relationship that I can imagine whether with the people of God or with some other part of Creation. The people who died as well as those who were wounded in Nice, France obviously had no control over what happened to them. Nor did the teachers or the students who have died in any number of school shootings have control over their attackers. There may be rules in place to limit our behavior, but for those who are willing to die for their cause, the rules are irrelevant. Yes, the police and other law enforcement agencies do their best to protect us. However, no one can exercise enough control to guarantee our safety 100% of the time.

If we cannot control every situation or rely on elected or appointed officials to do so every moment of every day, what are we to do? Perhaps we could begin by carefully setting aside at least a few minutes each day to ask, "How have I interfered with God's will today?" The question is never "If" but "how?"

We, and that certainly includes me, are all self-centered to one degree or another. That is to say, we want our way. In the process of trying to have our way, we often fail to ask the questions "What does God want and need from me at this moment? How can I best serve God right here and right now?" If we don't ask the question, "How have I interfered with God's will today?" we may not recognize that God is calling each of us throughout the day to follow where God's love leads.

In other words, although we cannot always control what happens, we can make a choice over how to respond. We may not be able to or even necessarily should try to regain control at that moment. However, as long as we are conscious we can pray about how to respond. In 12 Step language (as in AA, NA, OA, etc.), we can ask God for the serenity to accept the things that we cannot change, the courage to change the things that we can and the wisdom to know the difference!" In Christian terms we can ask God "What do you need from me at this moment?"

I find a prayer attributed to Richard Hooker very helpful in preparation for answering this question. You may remember a version of it from a movie, a musical or a book of prayer:

"O dear Lord, three things we pray: to see thee more clearly, to love thee more dearly and to follow thee more nearly, day by day by day." Amen.

Rev. Larry LaPierre