

Beyond our opinions

Every day cable news is filled with talking heads. That wouldn't be so bad, except that the talking heads are often arguing, talking at the same time and sometimes raising their voices. When the cacophony starts, I find myself changing channels or turning off the TV. Social media is even more opinionated. Often thinking they are anonymous, many people will say wildly unreasonable things on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and Facebook – things they probably wouldn't say in person.

Paradoxically, our ability to communicate instantly has not brought us together. It's driven us apart in many cases. Our society is more divided than ever. To cite one obvious example, I'll mention politics. Partisan battles have always been a part of American life but these days there seems to be less and less common ground where people of differing views can meet to work out solutions for the overall good of society and especially for the poor and vulnerable.

In fact, some would argue that society has become so consumed with partisanship, that even Catholics no longer view the issues of the day through the lens of the church's social teaching. Quite the contrary. Today many people view the church's teachings through the lens of partisan politics. If one of the church's teaching is in accord with one's political opinion, then it's OK. But if not, then surely the church must have gotten it wrong.

Politicians of every stripe have been known to treat the church's teaching in this way but so do many other people who would never dream of running for office. And it's an easy step to take, especially if as citizens we are passionate about politics and policy.

But then comes Holy Week and Easter – that one week in the year which, more than any other, takes us to the very heart of our faith. During this week, we meet anew the Christ, God's only Son, who assumed our humanity. If we pay close attention to the Scriptures, we will find that Jesus generated a lot of controversy. People had many opinions about who he was and what he was doing. People were either for him or against him. Some believed. Some were on the fence. And some wanted to trap him and put him to death. Jesus was aware of the controversy swirling around him.

Only, he didn't become consumed by it. With his disciples in tow, he headed for Jerusalem, knowing that the controversy would boil over and that he would likely face execution. His hour had come. The hour when he would redeem the world. The moment when he would surrender, not to earthly authorities like Pontius Pilate, but rather to the saving will of the Father. This was Jesus' moment to go beyond all controversy, beyond all opinions, beyond all specious reasoning - to do the will of the heavenly Father.

In doing this, Jesus strips away the opinions with which we so often cloak our humanity. He brings us to the essential question, in the end, the only question that matters for every person: Who am I? Why was I created? What am I doing on this earth? What is my destiny after death?

He answers those questions not with sentences but with his Person. He is God's love incarnate. Though sinless, he undergoes the one experience that epitomizes our alienation from God and from one another. In so doing, he gives himself to the Father and to us. He out-loves and outlives our sinfulness, our habit of excluding God's presence from our thoughts, our words, our decisions, and our way of dealing with others.

As Holy Week and the Easter season unfold, let us embrace the One who transcends our opinions and controversies. Only his love shows us the way. Then we will find the peace the world cannot give.