

One of the greatest problems we face right now is the intense polarization that has emerged between people. We are all different, and that is a good thing. But we have also seen how some of our differences over religion, over politics, and even over the handling of the virus have boiled over. Differences can sometimes lead to anger, or even worse as we've seen the rioting in Minneapolis this past week. Sometimes people see the other person as a threat, or someone they don't want to even listen to, or someone they need to "fix," or just shout down. But what if we didn't always see the other person as our polar opposite, but as a person created in God's image?

In the autumn of 1941, most of the Jews of Sarajevo were herded onto trains and sent to concentration camps. Some managed to flee; others joined the Partisans. Josef Kabilio, a Jewish artisan, was a close family friend of Mustafa Hardaga, a wealthy Muslim merchant. Not long after the Germans occupied Sarajevo, Mustafa Hardaga went to inspect one of his properties and found Josef Kabilio hiding there. Mustafa Hardaga now faced an excruciating moral dilemma.

If he turned Josef Kabilio over to the authorities, it would be condemning him to death. Yet, if he were caught sheltering a Jew, it would mean certain death for both of them. But this was his friend for many years; what was he to do? His high principles prevailed. He took Kabilio into his home and hid him there. Kabilio made two attempts to flee Sarajevo, and both times he was caught and jailed. On both occasions, he managed to escape from jail and again Hardaga, his Muslim friend, sheltered him in his home.

Zeyneba Hardaga, the merchant's wife, also had a close relationship with Kabilio. On one occasion she spotted him in a labor brigade and risked her life by bringing food to Kabilio and his fellow prisoners. At a later date, she explained her actions. "When Josef left us for the third time, all we could do was pray and hope. Later, when my children asked why I did this, I always answered what my husband said, "You do not abandon your friends."

Miraculously, Kabilio survived the war and returned to Sarajevo in 1945. Finding his home plundered, the Hardagas took him in. In 1948, he left for Israel, promising to write often, as did the Hardagas. Very soon the first letter arrived from Israel to Sarajevo, and they continued like a paper chain for decades.

Over the course of those years, Josef Kabilio married, had children and grandchildren, and became a widower. Similarly, Zeyneba Hardaga in Sarajevo became a widow and then remarried, becoming a mother and grandmother. However, with the passage of the years, in addition to losing her second husband, she also lost all of her property and a good deal of her health. Ultimately, a leg had to be amputated, and she could no longer walk. Despite all these woes, she never informed her good friend and correspondent, Josef Kabilio, of her troubles.

All the while and unbeknownst to her, Kabilio was hard at work in Jerusalem to have her recognized by Yad Vashem, Israel's National Holocaust Museum, as a Righteous Gentile, a non-Jew who went to extraordinary lengths during the Second World War to

save Jewish lives. He went many times to the museum to speak to the office in charge of this award and learned that the necessary process of substantiation was exceptionally arduous, and furthermore, this award had never been given to a Muslim.

Kabilio persisted in the face of many obstacles, and when he turned 88, Zeyneba Hardaga received a letter from Yad Vashem. They informed her of her award and told her that she would be flown to Jerusalem to receive it. Seven months later, Josef Kabilio had the privilege of watching his old friend helped off the plane at Ben Gurion airport. He was shocked to see that she could not walk. His first words were "You never told me!" With a smile, she scolded him saying "You never told me what you were up to, either."

Kabilio died just four years later and never knew how valuable his work would ultimately become in having Zeyneba recognized by Yad Vashem. The war broke out in Sarajevo in 1992. In February 1994, Mrs. Hardaga and her family were given special preference to escape the horrors of war by leaving the city on a convoy of 294 Muslims, Jews, Serbs and Croats, organized by the Joint Jewish Distribution Committee. This Muslim family had their lives saved by a Jewish organization.

Furthermore, Kabilio's family in Israel went to the Israeli authorities and arranged for an El Al plane (Israel's National airline) to be sent to the Sarajevo area to bring Zeyneba Hardaga, her daughter and her family, to Israel. All these miraculous events occurred in large measure because of Josef Kabilio's efforts to properly recognize his friend's heroism during the war.

Rabbi Richard Plavin, who wrote about these two friends, closes his story by saying "What beautiful symmetry. The Muslim Hardagas saved Kabilio when his life was threatened, and the Jew Kabilio was instrumental in having the Hardagas saved when their lives were in danger. Isn't this the way the world should always be?"

As we celebrate Pentecost, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit helps to facilitate this. Sin has created such ugly wounds, among them division. As sin divides Adam and Eve and humanity throughout the ages, we see what happens; hate and war and animosity. It continues to this day, as we've seen the effects of riots but also so many divisions over politics, religion; even the virus we deal with in the world becoming political. The unhealthy side of this leads to further tribalism, mistrust and even hate.

And this is where the Holy Spirit enters the picture. Among the fruits of the spirit include peace. The Spirit also helps us to become united rather than divided, bringing us together as we see in the apostles speaking in various languages; the power to transcend the language barriers that divide humans. So how can we strive for this peace that is so important in our lives for us to coexist with one another?

As a starter, I'd invite you to think about the word "fear" that we hear in our Gospel. The disciples are there we are told out of fear of the Jews, as certain members of their community they fear want them dead. When we become fearful of the other, it can lead

to misunderstanding, or seeing the other as a threat. Fear casts out love. Fear obstructs love of neighbor. There are some who are afraid of people because of their race; because of their politics; because of their religion; or because of the uniform they wear. It's not the kind of fear that necessarily leads to them running away from the person, but the kind of fear that divides and can lead to anger or seeing the other person as a threat. We must strive to start with what John Paul II stressed so much, that all are created in the image of God, and the only appropriate response is love.

Wisdom and understanding are also gifts of the Spirit, which help us to understand God and our faith better. And a component of our faith is love of neighbor, and striving to see others as God sees them. There has been much blood spilled between Jews and Muslims over the years in the Middle East, but Josef and Mustafa did not see one another as threats or enemies or let their religious differences get in the way, but had a life long friendship. In recent days, there was a powerful social media video of an African American man that runs about 3 minutes. He begins by explaining how he woke up and yelled at the alarm clock; then goes on to talk about his parents, his love of the Crimson Tide football team; share photos of his brothers; talk about how he is a Christian but has been assumed to be Muslim by some; how he loves the production of Oklahoma and finds bananas disgusting, and speaks of how his mother could make anyone she meets a better person. It closes by him saying how he wants to introduce himself before you call the police on him. And then you have people like Officer Tommy Norman from Oklahoma, who wakes up every morning trying to make a difference in the communities he polices. He's a white officer who works in neighborhoods with lots of black residents. He has followers on Instagram, and post after post with people from the African American community sharing how much good he's done. Said one woman, "I never believed that all cops are bad but lately that is all we the public have been seeing. I commend your humanity. You are a great example of how police should interact with the people in the communities they police." He's taken the time to get to know people in his community and talk to them, and build bridges by hanging out with neighborhood kids, collecting food, clothes and toy donations and reaching out on social media, as he puts it he believes in friending the community in stead of "driving up and down the street for eight hours with your windows up," and sees his ission as "parking the car, getting out, walking on the streets, sitting on some front porches and getting to know people and their stories." What a great thing when we can truly talk to one another. Even if we may not always agree on our religious or political beliefs or other things we feel so strongly about, when we start not with "I need to fix this person so they think and act like me" or "this person is different so I am afraid" but actually have dialogue and try to understand what it's like to be in their shoes and what their story is, we can truly accomplish so much.

The Spirit also gives us the gifts of patience and peace. As we try to love one another, one of the hardest things can be patience. We can feel the need to make change quickly or convert someone to our point of view. But it takes time for love to break down barriers. Its what led Officer Norman to not give up and eventually build those bridges, and so many other good things to happen with time. So hopefully we can resist the urge to shout or force our views on others, but also recognize when we see someone who

disagrees with us or when we get impatient, to listen but also have true dialogue with others, and also remember when we see someone making the wrong moral choices, when we are patient and still pray them and try to be there for them, ultimately change for the better can come from all this as they grow in grace through the power of the Spirit working through us.

However with this is also the importance of fortitude. It took fortitude for Mustafa to help his friend; for officer Norman to get out of his car and start talking to people. Fortitude is a major component of love. When we have fortitude, we can start building bridges between people and truly seeing progress, whether it's saying difficult things that need to be said when we see someone going down the wrong path, or talking about our differences with someone to gain an understanding of where they come from, or being the one who speaks out against bullying or injustice when we see it happening. The Spirit helps us to do the right thing, and it may be uncomfortable at first, but what a great thing when we can truly understand and help one another, rather than just yell at one another or hold our feelings inside out of fear of conflict.

This then ultimately leads to love, the kind of thing that Rabbi Richard said is the way that should always be the norm. Charity or love is a virtue of the Spirit. So is peace. We've seen this love on display throughout the pandemic as people have tried to help one another; we've seen it on display as people came out after the riots during the day to help clean up and repair the damage from the riots, people of all races standing side by side. Inside all of us is the power to do such good and make a difference, so let us ask ourselves what can we do to help those in need? From a phone call to praying for others, to volunteering or doing a simple act of love, we always have to look at the Eucharist and look at the cross and say God went this far for me, how far am I going to for others? And with that, like the story of Josef and Mustafa illustrates, we also make sure our definition of love does not just apply to those who think like us or look like us but to truly all people who are created in the image and likeness of God.

These are some of the most challenging times of our lives, for not only do we deal with the virus, but we also deal with the intense polarization that seems to reach new heights every day. It's OK to get angry when we see injustice in the world, it's OK to be passionate about what we believe in, but let us not forget the words of our Lord, "as the Father has sent me, so I send you" and our second reading, "as a body is one through it has many parts, and all the parts of the body though many are one body, so also Christ, for in one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of the one Spirit." We are meant to be different, but not divided. So let us strive to be people of love and not hate; of tolerance rather than aggression; and to look at one another and always first and foremost see someone created in God's image. What a gift we are given in the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Son to heal the wounds of sin in our lives to bring us closer to sharing in the Divine Life. As the Son is sent, we are sent as well to serve one another and love one another, and with the Spirit the wounds of sin are mended as the Spirit causes a new love and goodness to arise in our hearts. May that fire of the Spirit take over the fires of hate and division, and may we truly open our eyes, minds and hearts to the power of

love to triumph over evil and sin. As we pray Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. Let us do that as we go forth into the world letting the Spirit fill our souls with the love of God, which is so much more powerful than hate and sin. As the Father has loved Jesus, and He loves us, may we love one another and let the world know through our words and actions what that love looks like in action by bringing that love into the world and being the agents of love and peace that the world longs for.