

## When Love Transforms Hate

A few years ago, CBS News ran the following story on their "Sunday Morning" Show:

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They were the bitterest of enemies. For more than a decade, on the streets of Milwaukee, two men shared a mutual disgust.

One was a hard-nosed cop named Ray Robokowski.

"I wasn't a social worker; I was a police officer," he told Hartman. "My job was to take care of what needed to be taken care of."

Which was why Jacob Maclin didn't like him. "Oh, I definitely didn't."

Maclin, a drug dealer and gang-banger, got arrested so many times you can watch him grow old in his mug shots. And it was that career thug -- and this officer -- who sat down one day over a cup of coffee. The district attorney's office arranged it.

The meeting was to see if cop and criminal could work together, and come up with a way to get out of this vicious cycle. But neither guy was buying it.

Ray was only there because his boss made him come. And Jacob was tricked into coming -- told he had a job interview. So they basically just glared at each other the entire time.

So what was Robokowski thinking? "You're going to screw up and I'm going to find you and put you back," he recalled to Hartman.

To which Maclin responded, "Yeah, I'm glad he changed his mind."

It was Maclin who changed the cop's mind. Eventually, over the next couple months, Jacob proved to Ray that he wanted to get a job and turn his life around.

"He sent me on, maybe, 14 or 15 interviews in two weeks," recalled Maclin. "And one of them was Community Warehouse."

Community Warehouse is a non-profit, home improvement store that hires ex-cons and teaches them job skills. Jacob started working there, and is now on the management team.

To this day, he can't thank Ray enough.

Hartman asked, "You grateful?"

"Very, very, very, oh man, very ..." Maclin responded. He said "very" at least half a dozen times.

And as for that very helpful cop, he retired from the police force in 2014. But he still wanted to work, still wanted a job. So whom did he turn to for work?

"Jacob Maclin!" said Robokowski. "And he laughed. Now he held the cards. But I wanted to be here."

Through Community Warehouse, with his new friend Jacob, Ray has now helped more than a dozen other ex-cons leave their past behind.

Hartman asked Maclin, "Is Ray a different guy than he was when you first met him?" "Oh, definitely! Oh, did I say that too loud?"

"Pretty loud."

Jacob, of course, is equally unrecognizable. Today his only high-speed chases are around swing sets. He's got three kids and has vowed the cycle stops with him.

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Ray and Jacob certainly couldn't have been more different; yet they found a way to work together.

Certainly we won't be everyone's best friend, let alone like everyone. But as we all know, polarization and animosity can be very toxic; we see it so much today in politics, but also in divisions that happen amongst families, within parishes and communities; differences are good, and there is also right and wrong and things worth fighting for, but sometimes we can see others with hate that clouds what love could bring to the surface. It's nothing new. Saint Paul dealt with this in his church communities; as we hear in this week's second reading: ***"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose."*** So how can we live out Paul's words?

The starting point is to remember we are all created in the image and likeness of God. When we start there, we can treat people with greater dignity and see them not just for their function, their politics, their class, but as people God has created whom we are called to love.

Second, we need to confront discrimination. We have seen great strides in that as we celebrated Martin Luther King day this past week, but progress always continues. We need to be honest with ourselves, how do we react to our political opposite, or when we see someone who is of a different culture? What words do we use around the house to describe people, or even our Church which some can divide into liberal and conservative camps? If we tear down a person because a person is a liberal or

conservative and lump people together based on politics, religion, race, etc., this behavior is learned. It's toxic. You can't control how you feel, but we can control what we do with those feelings. We can pray for God's help to change; we can make sure we aren't saying things children might pick up on that are wrong; we can strive to get to know the whole person, not just a picture, and be honest with our feelings.

Third, we can look for bridges and common ground. The Second Vatican Council Fathers wrote that for all who seek God with a sincere heart, salvation is open to them. There is much that separates us in Christianity and from others, and also with respect to our politics and other beliefs. But, using that mindset that all are created in God's image, how would it be if we started with what we share.

And lastly, through it all, we must remember too we are different, but unique as a faith. Tolerance is a great thing. Cowardice is not. We can't fear talking about our faith, and as I've mentioned before part of being a Catholic means being engaged with the world, not just the people next to us in our pew. Jesus gives us a job in the Gospel: "come after me and I will make you fishers of men." This applies to all of the baptized, and now is the time to get in the boat, but also the time to throw the nets out. Yes there will be hostility at times, but there will also be souls brought to heaven when we courageously talk about our faith and strive to evangelize the world.

There is no getting around division in the world, in our country and in our Church. And in many ways, it can be a good thing. But how about we work on trying to remember we all belong to God, and rather than focus on what separates, work on trying to bring one another to the heavenly kingdom? What a good thing it is when we follow our Lord. For just as a net brings all kinds of fish into the boat, so too when we cast our nets will all kinds of people be brought into the heavenly kingdom, equally loved by the Master Fisherman without exception.