

Archbishop Smith: The Barricades Must Come Down!

No, I'm not referring to those barricades, the ones that have been preventing the flow of goods by rail. I have in mind a different kind of blockade. When we hear cries in Canada for barricades to be dismantled, reference is being made to the ones erected sporadically across the country by a few groups of people. My call is that of the Gospel, and pertains rather to barriers that are put up in every human heart. They stand as obstacles not to the uninhibited transport of goods but a holy way of life.

The readings on Sunday speak to us of some of these barricades. Leviticus warns against hatred in the heart or bearing a grudge against another person (Lev 19: 1-2, 17-18). St. Paul warns against bringing division to the Church, since it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3: 16-23). In his Sermon in the Mount, Jesus famously teaches his disciples not to hesitate to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, love our enemies and pray for our persecutors (Matthew 5: 38-48). In sum, when we refuse to love our neighbour as ourselves, with everything that implies, we put up barricades between ourselves and the fullness of life to which God calls us.

At the time of writing this blog post, it is not at all clear if or when the physical railway barricades will come down or how they will be dismantled. What is very clear, though, is how our spiritual blockades can be brought to an end. It happens by repentance.

Lent begins this week on Ash Wednesday. This is a wonderful opportunity to look closely and honestly at the ways in which our lives diverge from the Gospel's call to holiness. Where have we placed the blockades that impact the flow of grace? News reports might make us aware of the location and dynamics of the protest barricades, but no media can pinpoint the workings of the human heart. That requires a profound examination of conscience under the light and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A prayer for conversion, a plea to God to bring down the deadly spiritual barricades that separate us from one another, is suggested by Pope Francis in his Angelus address of Sunday. Referring to the Syrian conflict, he said this: "Let us pray to the Lord, that he may move hearts and that all may overcome the logic of conflict, hatred and revenge in order to rediscover themselves as brothers and sisters of one Father, who makes the sun rise over the good and the bad." That same logic will govern all of us whenever we set up barricades between ourselves and the Gospel. It needs to be overcome; the barriers must be dismantled.

When we acknowledge our barriers and place them before the Lord in sincere

contrition, God, by His Word of forgiveness, will bring the blockades in our hearts crashing down, clear away the debris, and show us the way back to Him and to one another.