

In Today's Society, What Does "Being Normal" Mean?



by **Father Denis
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Many people are influenced by what our society considers to be "normal", especially among the young people who feel it is important to be integrated within a group, to not feel different from the others.

But what ought we understand by "being normal"? This is a complex question which we will examine from the angle of our belonging to the Lady's Work. First of all, we are not insensitive to the way the people around us live, nor to the way we are perceived by others. We can very well claim that we do not want to let ourselves be influenced by the opinion of others, but the fact remains that at times we feel like people from outer space, for, even without saying a word, even without reproaching anything to the members of our families or to our neighbors, we sometimes feel there is coldness or mistrust, if not even rejection, because it happens that we are perceived as a threat.

THE DESIRE TO BE NORMAL

First of all, however, what is the situation in society in general? If some people seek to stand out from the rest of society through behaviors, clothing or jewelry that is out of the ordinary, most people, on the other hand, sensitive to the image they give to others, do not want to be different from what is normal. However, it is nonetheless true that we often give too much weight to appearance, to the detriment of the being, of interiority.

Thus, certain persons spend much more than they should in order to show others that they are of a social class which is either equal or superior to theirs. Others, in public, will pretend that there is no problem in their marriage, exchanging smiles and kisses, whereas in everyday life, there is no longer any dialogue, but rather indifference and even conflict. Others, on the other hand, are very sensitive to what the others think, so that because they are afraid of this opinion or what they think this opinion is, they adopt behaviors

which go against their beliefs.

So it is, for example, that a Christian may be afraid to make the sign of the cross in public or that a young Catholic girl does not dare assert her desire to remain pure until marriage for fear of losing the young man she is dating, etc. However, if the young girl does not respect herself and does not defend the values which are important to her, how can she hope to be respected by her friend? Similarly, if a priest does not respect himself and dresses any old way, adopts a language and manner unbecoming his mission, and frequents places which are not suitable for him, how can he hope to be respected for what he really represents?

Often, fear accentuates the idea we have of what the others might think of us, of the way they might react when faced with our choices, and this fear can paralyze us to the point where we prefer melding into the mass rather than being cast aside or being subjected to mockery. In certain cases, we can even reach the point of laughing at things which we should nevertheless be defending, or not support the truth being ridiculed, or not practise the charity we should.

WHAT IS "NORMAL"?

The word "*normal*" is defined as something which is in conformity with the norm and, usually, to that which is the most frequent within a community. Thus, what is considered to be normal becomes like a rule against which we compare ourselves or to which we wish to conform, in keeping with the well-known saying: "*Everyone is doing it, why don't you?*" Thus, in that kind of context, what is contrary to the norm, what is out of the ordinary, then becomes "abnormal".

In that case, the norm is a sort of "average", of consensus of the social life. However, it is very relative and can quite easily change. Consequently, so many actions and behaviors which, at a certain period, were considered to be abnormal have become something quite common nowadays. We need only think of divorce, living together before marriage, abortion, and so forth.

And yet, Paulians cannot be content with statistics or with the "average behav-

ior" of a group when adopting a moral line of conduct, all the more so since, for us, it is a matter of entering into the Kingdom of God on Earth which Marie-Paule so painfully merited.

Of course, "being normal" for a Paulian, as for every human being, will always consist in respecting a norm, a way of life. However, unlike what is happening in our permissive society, the norm for the Paulian is dictated by On-High. It is based on the spirituality of the ten Commandments, of the Beatitudes in the Gospel and on participation in the sacraments, without forgetting the program of life proper to the Knight of Mary who understands the fight for virtue and interior reform aimed at uprooting our vices and our defects.

Therefore, it is not because the majority of people thumb their noses at the divine law that the Paulian can allow himself not to follow it. For us, "being normal" is striving to be faithful to the teaching received, to the commitment made, to the calling we have benefited from in the Work.

As long as the Prince of this world will not have been driven out and put into chains, there will be enmity between the sons of darkness and the sons of light who go against the current. Right now, an attempt is being made to confine religion to the private domain, but that is contrary to the Kingdom to come in which the Church and the State will work hand in hand, in which the evangelical principles and the teachings of *Life of Love* will imbue all the sectors of society.

THE LOSS OF THE MORAL SENSE

We must not be surprised at the apostasy of the Quebec people, given that, for generations, we have been afraid to pass on the values our forefathers nevertheless courageously defended. Alas, an entire people has let itself be drawn into the spiral of "the fear of not being like the others" to the point of having broken off their relationship with God.

How has our society reached that point? How have we reached the point of considering as abnormal the persons whose behavior everyone would have thought to be normal only a few decades ago?

A quotation which is attributed to Saint Augustine (a Father and Doctor of the Church, 354-430) sums up well this process of moral degradation we have witnessed in our society which, in the past, used to be so Catholic: “*By dint of seeing everything, we end up by putting up with everything. By dint of putting up with everything, we end up by tolerating everything. By dint of tolerating everything, we end up by accepting everything. By dint of accepting everything, we end up by approving everything.*”

Thus, how do we explain that someone who, previously, used to turn away from certain images and conversations, is, today, inclined to say: “There’s nothing there!”? Quite simply: this person began watching or listening to just anything on Internet or another media form, so that his tolerance level changed and the voice of his conscience was as though stifled.

And then we start to put up with mockery against virtue or religion. And we tolerate anything, even that which, at a certain period, would have scandalized

us. And we end up by considering to be normal those behaviors which, in the past, would have been decried and even punished. These latter have now become “a part of the morals”, such as the union of persons of the same sex, divorce so easily obtained without any effort at conciliation, abortion to which we have recourse so easily and unhesitatingly, the vulgarization of drugs and even assisted suicide which they dare to describe as “dying with dignity”. If we have reached the point of such situations, that is because we have convinced the population that it was “normal” and thus legitimate to approve, to support and even to favor, in some cases, that which goes against God’s laws, but which, as soon as we no longer believe in God, is not perceived that way.

It was claimed that all these “reforms” were obvious, that the people wanted them, without there even having been any consultation except through opinion polls (which we know can easily be manipulated). If, at a certain period of time, it was

clear that such an action was considered to be an evil by most people, today this same action is considered to be something good, something entirely legitimate, if not in fact a need.

Nothing is bad anymore, nothing is a sin anymore, except, of course, what goes against the so-called present normalcy. Thus, faithfulness to the same woman or the same man during one’s entire life, purity, the practice of religion in public, and so many other rules of life, all of this ends up being perceived as a living reproach by our laxist society which bases everything on “rights”.

So, is everything then lost? Looking at it from a human point of view, perhaps, but God is stronger than human viewpoints and He will not let humanity go astray indefinitely. As for us, what is necessary, what we will need more and more is a virtue that is somewhat forgotten today: courage, a lot of courage, in order to stand firm in situations which are increasingly difficult while waiting for the world to change and return to God. ■

The Holy Innocents

When we think of the massacre of the Holy Innocents, it might seem strange that these children, two years old and younger, could be saints and recognized as witnesses of Christ, that is, martyrs. Most of those children never knew Jesus and they did not know that He was the Son of God. And yet, they are thought of as the first martyrs for Christ.

In our eyes, this massacre is horrible and it could make us doubt the goodness of God who permitted such cruelty. However, the way God looks at that event is very different from ours. First of all, He did not really want that action; He simply permitted it. He permitted it in the sense that He did not take away King Herod’s freedom, so that this latter could just as easily do good deeds in favor of his people as bad ones. The same is true for each one of us as we sometimes use our freedom to sin.

In this case, God permitted that the King’s hatred be vented on these innocent beings, so as to protect His Son, so as to save humanity, so as to give these children a privileged place in Heaven. It is because He can draw a greater good from this that the Lord permits evil or suffering and that, a short time after the birth

of His Son, He permitted the martyrdom of these Holy Innocents.

God, the great Coordinator of souls, is able to arrange events and make use of the actions each one accomplishes in his freedom in order to realize His plan of love in favor of every soul that wishes to journey towards Him. Thus, the killing of the little boys from Bethlehem and the surroundings allowed the Lord to realize a plan of love for those souls.

In fact, children are sensitive to love from their mother’s womb. If a premature baby does not receive love, he will decline in spite of the controlled environment of the incubator and the food fed him through a feeding tube. So too, the Holy Innocents were reacting to love. God, by permitting their killing, wanted to give them a love that was even greater than that of their mother and their family. He was giving them His love.

But why at that age? “*God’s ways are not our ways,*” Mother Paul-Marie wrote in a little book bearing that title. In the Lord’s living mosaic, the pieces do not all have the same color or shape and do not have the same role. But all of them can love, in keeping with the soul’s correspondence to grace.

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It is true, however, that the Holy Innocents could not make a deliberate choice for Christ. But we who are endowed with reason and knowledge, whether we are children, mature adults or patriarchs steeped in years, are we really any more aware than the Holy Innocents of the love of God which awaits us?

Thus, despite the limitations inherent in their age, the Holy Innocents are choice witnesses of God’s love for each one of us, of our hope in God who waits for all of us in Heaven and who arranges everything so that we can fulfill the plan of love He conceived for us, so that we can LOVE. We are on earth in order to learn to love and we will be judged on love.

We who have the grace of being able to make our love grow, let us take advantage of every moment, then, in order to love. Let us look at the examples given us by Mary, Jesus and Marie-Paule. Heaven with the Holy Innocents is awaiting us, and the Father’s Heart will be ours for eternity. ■