

My family and I love movies and so this past week we saw *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, starring Tom Hanks as Fred Rogers or “Mr. Rogers” as he was known on his popular children’s TV series *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. While I had some critiques of the film, overall I thought it was great and I’d recommend it to anyone.

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood explores the life and work of Fred Rogers, an ordained Presbyterian minister who lovingly dedicated his life to improving the lives of children and spreading kindness, compassion, and mercy. It’s a simple, yet beautiful film with many great messages. But above all, the movie emphasizes the intrinsic dignity of *every* human person and *a genuine culture of encounter*, which, in our technological age of laptops, iPhones, Ipads, and social media, is so desperately needed. In fact, the tag line for the film, which is found on its theatrical poster, is “We could all use a little kindness.”

What *is* “kindness”? I think when we hear the word “kindness” we can be tempted to think that kindness is just some “fluffy puffy, politically correct” secular value that’s so easy to talk about. Yet sadly, I would argue that given the political and cultural climate of 2019, which

is so toxic, kindness has tragically *become controversial* in many ways, which is extremely disturbing in my view. So is “kindness” simply “being nice” and not judging the behavior of others as if we were “moral relativists”? No. The Modern Catholic Dictionary defines “kindness” as: “One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit; the quality of understanding sympathy and concern for those in trouble or need. It is shown in affability of speech, generosity of conduct, and forgiveness of injuries sustained.”

So kindness should not be reduced to some secular value. Rather, kindness is explicitly rooted in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus was eminently kind, especially to those who were the weakest and most vulnerable of His time—those on the margins of society whom most people rejected and avoided. As Love Incarnate, our Savior is the supreme Model of kindness, just as He is the perfect embodiment of all virtue. Indeed, kindness is one of the 12 Fruits of the Holy Spirit, thereby indicating the active indwelling presence of God within the heart of a Christian.

So why am I talking about kindness on the First Sunday of Advent, when the message of the Gospel is to “stay awake” and “be prepared” for the second coming of Christ? Brothers and sisters, “to stay awake” and “be prepared” for the second coming of Christ is to do *exactly* what St. Paul wrote in our second reading today: “***Let us then throw off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light***; let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy. ***But put on the Lord Jesus Christ***, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.”

Brothers and sisters, to “be prepared” and to “stay awake” means to ***put on our Lord Jesus Christ***—to immerse ourselves in Christ and allow ***Him*** to live and to love ***through*** us! This is the goal of the disciple—to be so intimately united with Jesus that it is ***He*** who lives through us—through all of our thoughts, words, and actions. Therefore, to put on Christ, to put on the armor of light, means to bear the divine fruit of kindness!

And so, not only would I echo the tagline of *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*: “We could all use a little kindness,” I would go even

further to say, that *now in 2019*, we could all use *a lot more kindness in our country and culture!* Brothers and sisters, *all of us* need to grow in kindness towards our neighbor—our neighbor being *especially* those we encounter on a daily basis: our family, friends, co-workers, classmates, superiors, fellow drivers on the road, total strangers, etc.

And you know what, *kindness goes a long way*. A kind smile or a word to someone has the potential to totally change their day or their outlook for the better. And not to mention the universal reality that everyone suffers in some way. *Every* person is in the midst of some struggle within themselves or with someone else that we know *nothing* about. *Everyone* carries a cross that we know *absolutely nothing about*. Therefore, as disciples of Christ who are called to love God *and* our neighbor, kindness must be our pathway, because we have *no clue* what other people are facing and kindness can lift a suffering person out of their darkness. Kindness can give hope to those who have none! *Every* person, *especially a suffering person*, deserves to be treated with kindness, compassion, and mercy.

Moreover, kindness can transform lives and open others up to the Truth, goodness, and beauty that *is* God. Kindness can lead people to Christ and to the faith, hope, and love that He wants to give in great abundance! The Gospel call to kindness can be summed up in that beautiful “Golden Rule” given to us by Christ Himself: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31).

Now when we hear the message “be kind,” we can scoff at it and think, “Well that’s just some corny, flowery message.” Nothing could be further from the truth simply because *kindness is not always easy!* ***Kindness can be hard***, especially if you’re a fallen, imperfect person who’s inclined to sin, which is all of us. There are so many obstacles to kindness, such as selfishness, hatred, jealousy, envy, anger, pride, stubbornness, woundedness, etc.

Kindness is *not* always easy, especially when we’re talking about being kind to those people who hate us or just don’t like us for whatever reason. Or, if we’re honest with ourselves, kindness can be hard when we’re talking about being kind to those people who *we* don’t like for whatever reason: those people who hurt us, get on our nerves, push our

buttons, are mean, rude, and disrespectful to us. Being kind to *those* people can be *extremely hard!* But guess what, not only is such kindness *possible with the help of God's grace, but it is so worth it.* This earthly life is too short for pettiness, bitterness, grudges, childish rivalries, and jealousy. Kindness leads to freedom, happiness, and peace because it truly enables us to rise above evil and be the best version of ourselves and it can help liberate others to do the same.

Brothers and sisters, at this moment in history in 2019, our country and our civilization is in dire need of an authentic culture of encounter that is built on kindness, compassion, mercy, love, mutual respect, and the affirmation of the *intrinsic* dignity of *every* human life. Our Catholic faith, rooted in the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, provides the blueprint for this authentic culture of encounter that our world so desperately needs.

So on this First Sunday of Advent, as we strive to “stay awake” and “be prepared” for the coming of our Savior, may we heed the words of St. Paul and *put on Christ*, thereby throwing off the deeds of darkness

and putting on the armor of light—heavenly Light that shines through in
the beautiful fruit of kindness.