

A few days ago I spotted a copy of the North Coast Journal and noticed the cover article was about accused murderer Robert Durst. I grabbed a copy and began to read with interest. Now awaiting trial for murder in Louisiana, ^{now it} he's likely to have other DA's waiting to put him on trial even if he's exonerated for the ~~current trial~~. As I looked at the face of the alleged murderer I began to picture a likeness between Durst and Gollum. You remember Gollum from The Lord of the Rings story by JRR Tolkien. Gollum had at one time been a Hobbit, but he came into possession of the ring of power. Gollum had murdered in order to take the ring from a friend. Through time, the corrupting power of the ring turned him into a loathsome creature.

That murderous impulse—^{even} is it in all of us, or only some? Where does it come from? How might it be suppressed or cured? Does the death penalty deter a person from killing?

Recently, there is heightened controversy over the death penalty because the Supreme Court discussed a case where a drug cocktail had been administered to give ^{lethal} lethal injections to ~~convicted~~ ~~murderer~~. They concluded that execution by lethal injection is not cruel and unusual punishment, ~~even if it is bungled~~. But some of the justices desecrated the death penalty altogether, arguing that it was time to eliminate it ~~altogether~~ from our system of justice.

~~Murder has become a form of entertainment.~~ ^{the myriad} Have you noticed how many TV shows are about murder today? ^{what} I am stunned by how many programs show murder, morgues and mortuaries in vivid detail. Then, the heroes: smart, good looking officers, avidly seek to catch the bad guy who committed the murder. Often they end up catching the murderer by the end of the hour, sometimes shooting the guy if ~~they~~ ^{he} put up a fight. It's troublesome to me that we have shifted so dramatically from Father Knows Best, Leave it to Beaver and I Love Lucy, to myriad cop shows with murder victims. Is it Post 9/11 syndrome? Or, maybe it portends the death of our culture in the collective unconscious of our nation. Perhaps it also reveals our insatiable thirst for justice. What could be more satisfying than watching a murderer brought to a swift justice?

Years ago I listened to Rev. Bruce Thieleman tell a story about his visit to a prison. With the warden he toured the facility and talked to prisoners. After, as they passed by a mirror: the warden stopped, faced the mirror and said, "There is a murderer." Perhaps he meant that under the right circumstances, anyone could become a murderer. Upon hearing this, I was at first insulted. I had always viewed myself as a good person, a cut or two above those in prison, especially murderers. Upon further reflection, I have come to see the truth of the prison warden's proclamation: The line between good and evil runs through every human heart. ~~I was raised in a pleasant enough family, not perfect, but loving enough that I had a pretty pleasant upbringing. What about kids who are treated to just the opposite: abused, hit, insulted...~~ ^{we all choose how to treat others}

In my view, it's important for us all to look within and face our impulse toward violence, and then to look out and put into practice the idea that all of life sacred—especially human life.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment