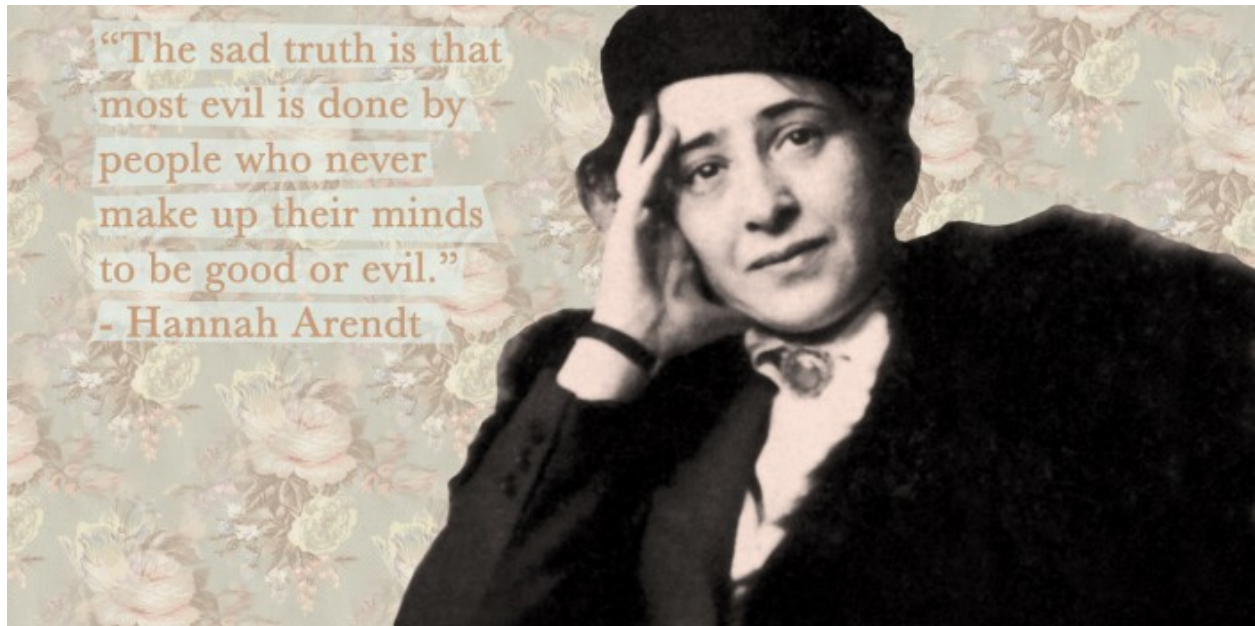


The 75th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Week. 39

Hannah Arendt : Eichmann in Jerusalem



Hannah Arendt was a Jewish philosopher who attended the trial of Adolf Eichmann and wrote the famous and controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem : A Report on the Banality of Evil*

When Hannah wrote that a small number of the Jewish leaders had in some form or another assisted in the gathering of Jews unaware of the Final Solution, She thus showed that no one has the moral high ground of innocence. No race, no religion, no culture, no country, no ethnicity can claim total and absolute innocence.

There was as she stated a total moral collapse not just in Europe but in the world. And no race, no religion, no culture, no country, no ethnicity escaped that collapse.

She strove all her life to find the answer to that moral collapse.

It is easy to assume that some people are inherently evil.
That some people plan the destruction of other people.

This allows us to objectify evil rather than face the existential reality of it that is revealed in Original Sin.

The ultimate Sin, the ultimate evil is the failure, the avoidance, the rejection and the denial of "existential" sin that "exists" in each of us.

An Existential Sin that does not plan, that does not premeditate, that does not have horns and a tail, that is not filled with rage and anger and violence;

That merely exists in each individual and institution in a banal kind of way and that gets up in the morning and has breakfast and goes off to work and returns home after a long hard day and that surfaces when the individual or the institution refuses to think, refuses to dialogue with itself, refuses to face the evil not without but within oneself, and its potential for horrific destruction not of buildings or civilizations but of the human person both individually and collectively.

The Evil, That easily goes from getting up in the morning, going off to work and returning home after a long hard day, to getting up in the morning, going off to work and returning home after a long hard day of killing millions as did Adolf Eichman and the commandant of Auschwitz.

Did Eichmann particularly care if those he was killing were Jews?

He showed none of the rabid hatred and dislike of Jews in his trial.

That is the banality, the absolute horror of his crime.

Because if he did it would have made him capable of "thinking" what it means to be Jewish.

What makes Jews different and unique.

Why should they be eliminated?

And from this "thinking"; from this reflection and inner dialogue with himself he would at least have had the potential and the capacity to ask why???????

Why the Jews?

What makes them different?

Why should they be eliminated?

These questions at least give the Jews existence, a purpose for being hated and possibly therefore an opportunity to acknowledge their existence and value.

The true essence of evil however is its banality.

It's total nihilism.

What makes evil truly evil is not its hatred of God or men which would give evil a purpose, a reason to exist.

What makes evil truly evil is its ultimate banality which is the total and absolute nihilism of all thought and emotion, of all meaning and love and its total lack of need for another, be it God or Man.

Even hatred has need of another; Another to hate, another to destroy.

Hatred lives to hate The Other.

If The Other did not exist neither would hatred.

Or It would at the least, have to exist within itself, hating itself.

Banality on the other hand has no passion, no desire, no need of another, God or Man which makes it the ultimate destructive force, the ultimate nihilism, the ultimate evil.

As soon as evil begins to think, to hate and thus acknowledge the existence of the Other, the door is opened for dialogue, for acknowledging individuality, for grace.

For Amazing Grace!

For a slave owner to look in the eyes of a slave and see "someone".

Not an object, but a person and begin to "think" about what he sees,

And this "thinking" opens the door for grace, conversion and change.

This is Something evil will never accept or do.
For this is the essence of banality.
The true danger of evil is its banality,
Its hiddenness,
Its facelessness.
Its ultimate lack of hatred!
Thus allowing it to do whatever it pleases, without thinking about it and without a conscience.
For the very nature of a conscience is "to think", "to reflect" upon its choices and decisions and actions.

Hitler was the classical understanding of evil in the Western thought and culture.
Premeditated;
Hateful;
inspiring legions to follow him and to destroy.

Eichmann is the Banality of Evil
Hidden;
Thoughtless;
Uninspiring.
Eichmann is the ordinary, everyday man on the street.
With one exception.
He never once thought about what he was doing which enabled him to be truly evil incarnate.
Without a conscience.
Without a thought.
Without ever wondering why and who he was murdering by the thousands.
This is type of evil is the most frightening and banal of all.

Prayer : Heavenly Father, no can claim to love You, whom we do not see, if we do not love love our brother and sister whom we do see. Open our eyes to see Your Face in the faces of those around us.

Meditations and Questions :

1. What is Original Sin?
2. How do I share in the sin of all humanity?
3. What personal sins do I have that affect others?
4. Do I need Amazing Grace to see those around me as God sees them?