I assume that you came here tonight to talk about Thomas Aquinas and his theory of just war so let me get straight to it. For Aquinas there was really only one way that war could be justified and it actually sounds a lot like the Boy Scout motto of leaving the campsite cleaner than you found it; meaning that if you are thinking of going to war, the outcome of that war must be one where through your actions in that war a more just society is created. An easy example of this is World War II where the Germans were gassing innocent people and so we intervened to stop them from gassing innocent people. Closing down Bergen Belsen and Dachau made the world a more just place. But while this is true, that is actually not the reason why we went to war with Germany or anyone did for that matter. We went to war because they started it. And Aquinas would say that is not a good enough reason. The argument for us going to war would need to be center on a desire to crush the wickedness of our enemy, not simply to hit them because they hit us first. So this all leads naturally enough to Hebrews, which states, “Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled.” And it really does tie in, because the author of Hebrews is essentially saying leave the campground cleaner than you found it – be the person that makes things better, not worse – pursue peace with everyone.

It goes without saying that our current political environment takes the opposite approach, not following the thinking of Aquinas. Our world does not say to pursue peace with everyone, but rather only people you agree with. If you disagree with someone you have free reign to make their life as miserable as you want because like in modern warfare – they started it. There is no sense of turning the other cheek, only getting even. The other day there was the State of the Union Address at which two very childish things happened. The first was Donald Trump’s apparently refusal to shake Nancy Pelosi’s hand. Some have speculated this was because of his anger over her bringing impeachment charges against him. The second childish thing was Nancy Pelosi tearing up the manuscript for Trump’s speech. We do not have to speculate on this one because she told us why she did it, saying it was, “the courteous thing to do considering the alternative.” And that the speech was a “manifesto of mistruths.” In both cases the justification is that the other person started it. Have we sunk so low as humanity that we are no more in control of ourselves than the inanimate objects described in Newton’s Third Law of Motion where every action has an equal and opposite reaction? You impeach me, I don’t shake your hand. You don’t shake my hand I rip up your speech. It is sad when a theory of war offers a much more gracious way to live than the one we are currently experiencing.

One of the traits of what used to be called growing up was selflessness. Meaning that sometimes we have to do something that is not necessarily good for us or feels right, but we do it because it was the right thing to do. We do it because it makes the world a better place. And to get our country to stop being a nation of reactors we are going to have to discover this again.

One of the weird things going on in our country is that times have rarely been better, combined with the fact that we can’t stand half of the country. I think much of this misery is connected to the fact that we are stuck in sort of demolition derby where we are either getting hit or hitting someone else. But maybe its time to realize that the Malachi Crunch is not going to solve everything. We are called to stand in the breach and be instruments of peace, spreading justice and leaving this world a little better than we found it.