

## The Milk of Human Kindness

Ponder: Even people who don't know God may be kind and good.

Scripture: “. . . when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary” (Acts 28:10).

Shakespeare's “Macbeth” seems to be the origin of the idiom, “the milk of human kindness.” But demonstrations of human kindness vastly pre-date the English poet. For example, when Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta (Acts 28), “the natives showed us unusual kindness” (v. 2). Some translations call these people “barbarians,” which is technically correct; but in Scripture, “barbarians” doesn't mean uncivilized savages; it simply means people who don't speak the common language (in this case, Greek – see Romans 1:14, Paul was a debtor to both Greeks and barbarians).

Far from being savages, the Maltese people were kind. Luke's word for kindness gives us our word “philanthropy” (literally “love of people”). They demonstrated their love by building a fire to warm Paul and 275 other cold, wet, hungry people shipwrecked with him. Later, the governor of the island hosted at least some of these unexpected guests for three days. And when the storm season was over, the Maltese people provided necessities for the stranded travelers to continue their journey. This probably included basics like food and clothing, since all such things had been thrown overboard to lighten the ship during the storm.

All of this might seem like normal behavior if not for the fact that the Maltese natives were pagans. When Paul was bitten by a viper, they presumed that he was being punished by the goddess of justice; then, when Paul suffered no ill effects from the bite, they concluded that he was a god!

We shouldn't think that people who do not know the true God are automatically immoral reprobates. Abraham erred by presuming that the pagan Egyptians would kill him to steal his beautiful wife. As it turned out, Pharaoh had a much higher code of ethics than Abraham thought (see Genesis 12:10-20).

Being kind didn't mean the Maltese people were saved. Paul used opportunities to heal many of their sick folks, and undoubtedly evangelized as he did so. Tradition holds that almost all the Maltese people had converted by the time Paul left. This is probably an exaggeration, but we would expect that at least some obeyed the gospel.

Be thankful that most people are basically decent. Do what you can to influence them for Christ!