

Sunday August 14, 2022
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Parishioner Reflection

By: Paul Legace

In today's gospel three key words are central to Jesus' message, division, choices and faith. Our Lord tells his disciples very abruptly that he has come not to unify but to divide. When one reads this gospel for the first time Jesus is very angry, impatient and resentful. These characteristics aren't ones I would normally associate with Christ and thus I'm shocked with his forceful tone. Why does he speak in this manner? What message is he trying to communicate to his disciples? Upon reflection Jesus is talking about making a choice; will you follow the path he has blazed that centres upon self-sacrifice and kindness or follow your own desires? We mustn't neglect our faith when making this difficult decision as well. The decision is one that will change our lives, involve hardships but can bring much joy and happiness.

When one reads the Gospel of Luke prior to today's excerpt Jesus tells his followers the parable of the master and the servant. The good servant is awake, prepared for the master to return after a wedding feast even though he doesn't know when his master will return. In the same manner one doesn't know the hour or the day when the Son of Man will return. One must be living a life that reflects what God desires, being kind and merciful to others especially the poor and marginalized, being honest and just with all you meet. The gospel this week is also about making choices when one is faced with division and uncertainty. Jesus tells the crowd "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!" Luke Timothy Johnson in *Sacra Pagina* believes Jesus is speaking about a prophetic passion and urgency. Jesus' passion will divide many people, divide households; this is because there will be diverse decisions made in response to the prophet himself and his message about the kingdom of God. Those who see him must not have blinders on; they must not let the light in them turn to darkness.

In the second reading St. Paul implores the Hebrews to throw off everything that weighs them down, including sin so they can persevere and continue running the race. He wants them to stay focused on Jesus who will lead them in their faith and bring it to perfection. St. Paul essentially tells the Hebrews they need to have faith in Christ. They have not seen him but need to have hope just like the Old Testament prophets had faith. They need to be determined! Jesus never doubted his Father, despite the challenges and

rejections he encountered during his ministry and even the suffering and death by crucifixion. Many American bishops believe Paul tells these early Christians the challenges of human life have meaning when they are seen as God's discipline. If they stay faithful to the word and persevere they will be given eternal life in God's kingdom.

The first reading from the Book of Jeremiah tells of King Zedekiah and how he listened to certain officials and had the prophet Jeremiah dropped into a cistern to die. An Ethiopian officer, named Ebed-melech convinces the King that he has been wrong in listening to his officials and their wickedness. King Zedekiah allows Ebed-melech to rescue Jeremiah from certain death. The king essentially allows the light within him to see the error of his ways. He will listen to God's prophet Jeremiah even though his words are not easy to follow and run counter to his official's advice.

How do these readings apply to us today in the 21st century? How can we change our attitudes and actions to reflect the gospel message? How can we distinguish the love of God from other forms that seem to bombard us daily in the media? One needs to look to Jesus to see how he lived his life to understand the love of God. He helped those who were marginalized, the poor, the sick, widows and many others. In our parish we have a number of groups who work tirelessly to help those who are poor and on the margins of our community such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Welcoming Arms, the CWL and the Knights of Columbus. One could volunteer some time to assist one of these organizations or contribute money to assist them.

Seeking justice is another goal Christ sought when he walked upon the earth for those who were poor, suffered from disease and were marginalized from society at that time. Pope Francis visited Canada three weeks ago to offer an official apology from the Catholic Church to the First Nations, Metis and Inuit Peoples for the role it played in residential schools and the harm it inflicted upon the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. This was a heartfelt gesture on the part of Pope Francis and was a necessary step to bring about reconciliation and healing. Much harm was inflicted upon the First Nations regarding many forms of abuse, the destruction of their culture, language and the death of many children due to neglect and very poor living conditions in these residential schools. A number of unmarked grave sites have been discovered where children were buried unceremoniously and more will probably come to light in the near future. The Catholic Church needs to do all it can to pay the compensation ordered by the courts, release all records about these schools and the deaths of those who were forced to attend them. The Church needs to assist lawyers on behalf of victims to bring all perpetrators responsible

for the abuse to justice regardless of their age. These acts of justice would be ones Christ would deem necessary based on his conduct with the marginalized and his teachings about forgiveness. We as Catholics should continue to ask questions and hold our Church leaders to account for the Catholic Church's actions in this deplorable chapter of Canadian history.

How do we care for the vulnerable in our society? How did Christ show compassion to widows, orphans and the downtrodden in his time? We were all children at some point in time. Who cared for you, fed, clothed, sheltered and loved you as a child and adolescent? We need to think carefully about how we treat our aging parents and older members of our society. As an aging population, Canada will need to provide more resources so that the health and welfare of this sector of the population is not neglected. The pandemic has exposed the numerous weaknesses in our long term care facilities. Who will lobby our provincial and federal governments to improve the care of our most vulnerable? Are there other models open to our society besides the institutional for profit model of care? Is enough being done to train and provide a living wage for personal support workers? Do we as Catholics see the value in someone long after they produce goods or provide services to our society? If we do, our actions towards the senior segment of our society must change.

Division, choices, and faith are part of everyday life. Christ wanted his followers to appreciate the hard choices they were going to have to make if they were going to follow him. His love for humankind knows no limits and his passion was the ultimate expression of that love. Do we have the strength of character to stand with the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized in our society even if it's not popular with our culture, friends and family members? Our actions will provide the answer.

Bibliography

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