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Jesus shows we must always respond to violence with an act of love

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 26, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

Every Sunday, if we listen carefully to the readings and sacred scripture, we will find a way that they impinge on our lives to give us guidance in the circumstances in which we live. I think it's quite extraordinary how the lessons today speak to us in a very particular way about the terrible experience that just happened to us and that terrible incident in Colorado that took place on Friday of this week.
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If we listen deeply to our scriptures today, we'll find guidance about how we should react to such an incident -- not only to that incident, but also to the extraordinary violence that constantly goes on in our world, within our country and throughout the world. In our first lesson this morning, as I mentioned in introducing that lesson, Jeremiah had been teaching for almost 50 years to the chosen people not to follow a way of violence, not to enter into a military alliance, but they refused to listen.

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Psalms 23: 1-3, 3-4, 5, 6
Ephesians 2:13-18
Mark 6:30-34
Full text of the readings [1]

So their enemy from Babylonia invaded, destroyed Jerusalem, left it in rubble, carried the people off into exile, and yet what does God say to them? He rebukes them first of all: "Woe to the shepherds that the leaders who must lead and scattered the sheep of my pasture." Now this is the message, God says: "You have scattered my sheep and driven them away instead of caring for them." God's response is: "I (God) will gather the remnant of my sheep from every land to which I have driven them and I will bring them back." God goes beyond that even.

Jeremiah says, God says further, "The day is coming when I will raise up a new ruler who is David's righteous successor. He will rule wisely and govern with justice and righteousness and that will be an extraordinary era when Judah will enjoy peace." Of course, what God is promising in those words is Jesus. He's going to be the successor to David, the great ruler of the chosen people. He'll be a successor who is a ruler of righteousness, justice, and who will bring peace to God's people.

In the Gospel is where we see this fulfilled. Jesus comes into the midst of God's people. He's preaching to them. He's teaching them. He's healing them. He's reaching out in love to them. He's urging them to give up hatreds and violence, and even when he's been at this for a long time and he and the disciples try to go away to have some quiet time of their own, the people precede them -- they see where they're going.

They get there ahead of time. How did Jesus respond? He doesn't send them away. No, he's a God of love, and so he's moved with compassion. His deepest emotions are stirred up with love and compassion for these people. This is God responding to them -- responding even to their failures to follow God's ways, but God responds with love. We must ask ourselves how carefully we have listened to this message of God and especially as God proclaims that message through Jesus and his constant act of love and compassion in response to every situation.

What happened on Friday in this past week -- that extreme act of violence and killing -- is not really something out of the ordinary for our country. It happened only 20 miles away from this spot in Aurora, Colo., just a few years ago at Columbine High School. It's happened recently on military bases. That kind of violence has gone

on almost incessantly in our country. But it's not something that is actually taking place in isolation. We have created, it seems, what people have called a culture of violence. We live in a culture of violence. In fact, I brought this piece from the paper this morning. Our entertainment is violence.

That very movie that people were going to see is described this way: "The villains in Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy are distinctive even by the standards of summer-movie bad guys, in that they seek nothing but violence and destruction. Money does not sway them, political power does not interest them, and any ideological posturing -- none of that interests them. Some of these villains are lunatic moralists for whom Armageddon is a purifying punishment that modern civilization deserves. Some of them are lunatic nihilists, men who (as Bruce Wayne's butler, Alfred, says of the Joker) 'just want to watch the world burn.' Either way, they cannot be bargained with or reasoned with, and all they want from us is death." Now that's our entertainment.

Isn't that a reflection of violent society when we have people going to watch a movie that promotes nothing except death, destruction and violence? We live in this culture of violence. It's present to us in other ways. This past week, a few days ago, a military person in one of our training camps where he was a drill instructor was convicted of rape and sexual assault against the trainees -- women. He entered a half a dozen others who are also going to be on trial. Instructors who do violence. What do you expect really? They're teaching these people how to be killers. They have to de-humanize them. They're de-humanized themselves, and so violence erupts.

What else would you expect? It's a culture of violence. We even do violence against our environment. We're destroying the environment because we don't nurture and care for it like we should, and so we experience now extraordinary weather phenomena. It's all part of this culture of violence. When I think of how we have waged war now since 1991 -- the killing, the disruption of lives of hundreds of millions of people -- how is that not another example of the culture of violence?

Now it's done illegally, immorally by people sitting at a desk in an air-conditioned room looking at a computer and then giving the signals to send drones over people in other countries, not even countries who we're supposedly at war with. These drones strike a village, kill people as innocent as those in the movie theater the other night -- women and children. It's all done, and we pay no attention. It's all part of our culture of violence.

The chosen people so long ago would not listen to Jeremiah. God says, I will come and be their shepherd. I will teach them. God does, and then God does in that very special way through Jesus. God sends Jesus -- God's own son -- to be one of us, to show us a way out of the culture of violence into a culture of love. Jesus teaches us to reject violence for any reason whatsoever. Always respond to violence with an act of love.

We've had 2,000 years now of this teaching of Jesus. We have to ask ourselves, Are we like those chosen people of old to whom God sent prophet after prophet after prophet? Finally comes God into our midst in Jesus. Are we going to listen and begin to change our hearts from hearts of stone, as Ezekiel calls them, into human hearts -- hearts of love? If we really want to transform this culture of violence within which we live, it's time for each one of us to begin to look into [their] heart and see if there's any of that hatred and violence that permeates our culture.

Try to change [your] heart and try to spread the message of Jesus, which is a message of an act of love and compassion always reaching out -- as he does in today's Gospel -- to teach, to heal, to bring solace and compassion. As we become that kind of people, then what is almost a miracle that Paul speaks about in our second lesson today, it happened.

Paul says there was a coming together of Jew and Gentile -- people who had been at enmity for centuries now, but through Jesus, they were brought into reconciliation and peace. Paul says that's happening. It will continue to happen and spread -- this whole message of reconciliation and love -- when each one of us looks into [our]

heart and prays that God will change that heart and make it a heart of love and human compassion like the heart of Jesus.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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