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Love should be our weapon, for Jesus is not a warrior king

Thomas Gumbleton | Oct. 26, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

As we begin a reflection on today's scriptures, it's very, very important for us to put these readings, especially the Gospel reading, within the context of the readings over the last few weeks. You may remember, it's been a number of weeks now, maybe six or seven since Jesus and the disciples began this last journey to Jerusalem. At the very beginning of it, something extraordinary happened, where Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is? But then who do you say?" And Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Messiah, the son of the living God," and Jesus was pleased and said, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of John. Humans have not revealed this to you, but God." So Jesus was just extraordinarily pleased that Peter had recognized he was the Messiah.

Then, for the first time (and this is so important), Jesus begins to talk about what's going to happen to him -- the same thing we heard today. "We're going to Jerusalem. There, the Son of Man will be handed over to his enemies," and so on. Peter says, "No, no, that can't be." I'm sure Peter had the idea, "Look, there's all these people following you," and Peter was probably thinking in the terms of overthrowing the Romans, the occupying army, and that terrible occupation that was so cruel, and thinking of Jesus as a warrior king, ready to overwhelm those who were against him. And Jesus said, "Get behind me, you Satan! -- remember, very harsh, "You're not thinking according to the ways of God, but you're thinking in human terms." Peter was put in his place, and they continued the journey.

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Isaiah 53:10-11
Psalms 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22
Heb. Pet 4:14-16
Mark 10:42-45

Full text of the readings [1]

And you remember last week, for the second time in this journey, Jesus says to the disciples, "We're on the way to Jerusalem. There, the Son of Man will be handed over to his enemies." And again, the disciples just seem not to be able to hear it. Jesus says it, they keep going. Then when they get to the house where they're going to stay, Jesus says to the disciples, "What were you talking about on the way?" Well, they didn't answer very quickly, because they had been talking about who is to be the greatest. Again, Jesus is saying to them, "No, you can't try to strive for greatness in that sense," and he took a little child, sat that child, not because the child was so charming, but because a child is a symbol of someone who is oppressed, has no rights, very vulnerable. "Unless you become like a child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. You must give up power, first places, and so on."

Also in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus taught us about not putting our security in the wrong place. Remember, this was the episode where the young man comes and says, "I've kept all the commandments. What else must I do to enter the reign of God?" "Go sell everything you have, give your money to the poor, and follow me on this road to Jerusalem," without wealth, without power, without any commitment to violence, no armies, nothing like that. The young man went away sad because he had much wealth and he wasn't ready to put his trust solely in God and understand that everything he had came from God, and that if he continued to trust in God, God provides for all. Everything in the universe is given for all, given for us.

Today once more, the disciples are arguing about who's going to have that important place at the right and important place at the left of Jesus in the reign of God. No, if you want to be a leader in [Jesus'] community, among [his] followers, you must be the servant, even the slave of all. The slave -- giving yourself, your life over

in service of others out of love. That's what Jesus did, and so dramatically. This is really the good news that Jesus is proclaiming, that he is offering his very life, pouring it forth in love for every one of us, for every person of all times, all ages. It's said so vividly. This is not a prophecy about Jesus, but we apply this teaching from the book of the prophet Isaiah about the servant. We apply it to Jesus.

When you read the description, even though it was proclaimed hundreds of years before Jesus, you really can, in your own imagination, see Jesus during his suffering and death: "He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, familiar with grief. A man from whom people hide their face, spurned, considered of no account; yet ours were the sorrows he bore, ours were the sufferings he endured." He did this out of love for us. Destroyed because of our sins, he was crushed for our wickedness, and by his example, pouring forth love during this time of his suffering. We are made whole by his sufferings, his wounds we are healed. That's the good news. Not that Jesus paid a price for our sins, bought us back from a cruel God; no, God always loves us, but Jesus shows us the way to be healed of our sins, to begin to be people who love as he loved, and not just those who love you, but love your enemies.

That's the image that we see there in the word of Isaiah, but they are clearly a picture of the way Jesus died, pouring forth his love on all, even those who are his enemies. "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself." This is the message of Jesus, the good news of Jesus. So we must not think of Jesus as a warrior king who will overwhelm our enemies, God's enemies. (We tend to make our enemies God's enemies.) No, not that. And not a Jesus who will through wealth have security -- no, only through trust, confidence in God. And not a Jesus who will lord it over others, but one who is ready to be the servant of all in love. That's what Jesus shows us.

Here in these lessons today, and as they conclude this part of the Gospel where Jesus is on his trip to Jerusalem, we learn what is the most radical teaching of Jesus, that our world will be transformed, not by violence, not by wealth -- the domination of the material goods of the earth -- and not by lording it over others. No, our world will be healed, each of us will be healed when we learn to follow the way of Jesus, the way of love, the only way that our world can be transformed.

I suggest, as we reflect upon these lessons today, to listen carefully to the debate between the president and Gov. [Mitt] Romney tomorrow night. It's going to be about foreign policy, and I suggest that if we listen, we'll discover that we as a people are very, very far from the way of Jesus. We want a military that will be the strongest military in the world, in all of history, even. We want to get the goods of the earth, guarantee them for us. And we declare ourselves the strongest nation. That's not the way of Jesus.

We're not going to change our world and our nation overnight, but isn't it necessary for us to begin to think in other terms? To think about how we can transform this earth through caring about our environment, stewarding carefully the world around us, finding ways to share the goods of the earth with all, not try to accumulate them for ourselves alone; giving up the attempt to change the world through war, through violence? It may seem overwhelming; it may seem impossible; but I suggest that it is the way of Jesus, and that if we are to be followers of Jesus, we have to really listen to Jesus.

Those first disciples at first weren't able to hear Jesus, but finally they did, and they followed him even if it meant martyrdom for them. And we can't think that this is impossible. Listen to our second lesson today. "We have a great high priest, Jesus, the son of God, who has entered heaven. Let us then hold fast to the faith we profess." Here's the key point: Our high priest, Jesus, is not indifferent to our weaknesses, to the problems that we face, to the evil that we must try to transform into goodness. Jesus is not indifferent to that, for he was tempted in every way, just as we are, and yet without sinning.

Jesus was fully human when he taught these disciples -- fully human -- and he challenges us, who are human, who feel that it's impossible. He underwent that death that poured forth love upon all of creation, all of

humankind, and continues to pour forth that love upon our world. We must enter into a deeper union with Jesus, our brother, and try to be more like him in everything we are, everything we do, become the servant of all out of love. We must try to do that, and each of us individually, and continue to work to transform our world, the world around us from a world of war and hatred and violence and overconsumption of the goods of the earth -- from that kind of a world, transform it into a world of peace and goodness. We can only do this by being deeply converted, following the way of Jesus in love, becoming a servant of all out of love, transforming our world into the reign of God, out of love.

[Homily given at St. Ann Church in Frankfort, 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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