Spirituality



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The first two lessons today remind us of what Lent is about, the purpose of Lent, why we have this six-weeks of special prayer, penance, and good works. Both of those lessons recalled a covenant by God with God's people. That's what baptism is: it's a covenant each of us entered into at the moment of our baptism. We declared (or our sponsors through us if we were an infant), "I am ready to be a child of God, a member of the family of God, brothers and sisters to Jesus." God promises to be a God of love and care and concern for us.

Saturday after Ash Wednesday

Feb. 17, 2018

Isaiah 58:9B-14

Psalms 86

Luke 5:27-32

The season of Lent in the beginning of the church was a time when all of those who were to be baptized at Easter went through this very special preparation where the pouring forth of God's cleansing water of baptism upon them to give them that new life. We today begin our season of Lent, I hope, with the understanding that we too are called to renewal, a renewal of our baptismal promises, and a recommitment of what our baptism means as we become disciples, followers of Jesus Christ.

On Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday we will make that renewal of our baptismal promises. If we prepared well it can be a real important moment in our life when we begin more than ever to follow the way of Jesus because that's what Jesus asks for in the Gospel. He says, "The reign of God is at hand." That means the fullness of life for every person on earth. That's what the reign of God would mean because the reign of God is God's love overseeing or bringing dynamic power of God into the human family, into human history, transforming our world so that it becomes a world in which the human family flourishes, every person has an opportunity for the fullness of life, peace and joy and love.

Perhaps some of us remember that this Gospel actually was the Gospel we proclaimed on the second Sunday of this new church year when we began the Sundays of Ordinary Time. So we've heard this just six weeks ago. I wonder how

many of us have really thought about changing my life so that the reign of God will burst forth within my life and I will help to bring about the transformation of our world into this reign of God. If we forgot it from that Sunday, I hope today and throughout Lent we take it very seriously because we need this transformation of our world.

Once more this week we find how the culture of violence in which we live breaks into the open. Seventeen children are killed, others wounded. Do you know that's happened 18 times—a school where children are attacked with guns—18 times since the beginning of this calendar year? It's so common we almost don't hear about it unless it's something huge like on Wednesday. We live in this culture of violence. In the paper just the other day, there was an article that I found extraordinary.

It tells about youngsters in that high school in Florida who were hiding in a darkened room trying to make sure they weren't going to be killed. One of the students who was studying to become a journalist, his name was David Hogg. He's 17 years old, a lanky senior, aspiring journalist. He turned on the video recording on his phone and pointed it at the classmates who were hiding there with him in this dark classroom.

"What's your message?" He said to the other students. One after another his classmates responded. "I personally have rallied for gun rights," said one young girl, her voice shaky but forceful. "I wanted to be a junior NRA member, but to have the bullet pointed at me, my school, my classmates, my teachers, my mentors, it's definitely eye-opening to the fact that we need gun control in our country." The gunman was still at large, yet those in hiding kept trying to make sense of it all.

Another young woman student said, "If you looked around this closet and saw everyone just hiding together, you would know that this shouldn't be happening anymore," her eyes wide and fear visible on her face. Later on Mr. Hogg was interviewed and he made remarks that captured the sentiments of many of his classmates. He said (and this is a 17-year-old), "On a national scale, I'm not surprised at all and that's just sad. The fact that a student is not surprised that there was another mass shooting, but that this time it was at my school, says so much about the current state that our country is in and how much has to be done."

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"The violence must stop," he said. "We need to do something. We need to get out there and be politically active. Congress needs to get over their political bias with each other, work together toward saving children's lives." Later expressing his frustration on CNN television he said, "We're children. You're the adults." That's so true. Here these children are telling us what needs to be done and committing themselves to do it. Why aren't we adults becoming more convicted that we have to change our lives just as Jesus says to change your lives, follow the Gospel, live according to the way of Jesus?

Give up violence, give up the idea that violence can overcome violence, that one gun can be better than another and bring peace. It won't. We have to find a new way. Even today in the news it's reported how children across the country are beginning to mobilize. Imagine this: some of them are saying, "We may stay from school for a day or maybe a week to dramatize that things have to change." They're the children; we're the adults. Can we listen to the way of Jesus as he proclaims through his life, his actions, and his words?

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"There is one command I give you: love one another as I have loved you." In the garden before he was put to death when someone tried to protect him with a weapon, "Put away your sword. Those who live by the sword die by the sword." Jesus has shown us a different way. It's time that we began to follow him. If we really mean it when we say, "I want to renew my baptismal covenant with God," at the end of this season of Lent, we must work to change our ways, change the ways of our country, and finally bring the reign of God closer where we will have peace in our daily life. The reign of God is at hand. Follow the Gospel, follow Jesus, and change your life.

[Homily given on Saturday, Feb. 17, 2018 at St. Philomena Parish, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. Sign up here to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]