Spirituality



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Last week, when Jesus taught us how to pray, he began with teaching the words we call the "Our Father." At one point, as you recall, we pray in that prayer: Give us this day our daily bread. God wants us to have all that we need for a full human life. But God wants that for every person on this planet, and while some of us have far more than we need, others live in absolute poverty. That's not what God intends. It's very important for us to listen carefully to today's Gospel.

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 4, 2019

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23

Psalms 90

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21

Avoid greed in all its forms. Do not pile up material possessions thinking that you can always guard against whatever might happen. Try to remember that everything we have is a gift. Yes, we work to earn things, and yet, if we didn't have that capacity to work, if God didn't call us into being to begin with, we would be nothing. Everything is a gift, so we must avoid greed, piling up things for ourselves alone. This doesn't mean, of course, that God wants any of us to be in destitution.

Part of our teaching flowing from the Gospel, as enunciated by Pope Paul in an encyclical letter back in 1967, tells us that no one has a right to anything beyond their need when others lack the barest necessities. That's a very challenging statement. We don't hear it often, but it's what our Catholic Church teaches us flowing from the Gospel. You do not have a right beyond fulfilling your needs if others lack the barest necessities. It's difficult to determine what are my needs? How much do I have to prepare for the future? How do I safeguard for my children? And so on.

Of course it's difficult, but if we're way beyond what we need, and in our world and it's certainly true here in the United States, we have a huge gap between the very rich and the poor and destitute. Most of us aren't on that very top level, but perhaps

we have a bit more than we need and we could share more generously with those who are without what they need. Even more important, perhaps we have to be very careful about what is happening within our economic system. Why do the rich keep getting richer and the poor poorer?

Why does Warren Buffett talk about the fact that he, a billionaire, pays less in taxes than his secretary? Who wrote that tax law? Who passed it? That enables the rich to get beyond their need by billions while an ordinary working person is struggling to make it. If we neglect to look at what's happening in our political system right now, we're failing to reach out to the poor. We have a responsibility, not only to share what we have in excess (and certainly many of you, I'm sure, do that), but we also have a responsibility to try to make sure that our elected officials write tax laws that spread the wealth more equitably among all the people.

That is one of the things that Jesus tells us when he tells us to beware of becoming greedy. As we go on and listen to the second lesson today, there are a couple of other things that I think are very important to us at this present time in our history. St. Paul, in writing to the church at Colossi, tells them, "If you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above. Don't be just looking to pile up your material goods in this world, for this life. Set your mind on the things above, not on earthly things for if you have died with Christ, your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

Paul says, "Clothe yourselves then as is fitting for God's chosen people." He's calling us to be more like Jesus, the risen Christ. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience — all of those things, but compassion, especially. Isn't that something we need to develop when we confront what is happening at our border? We must have compassion. "Bear with one another. Forgive one another. Overall these things put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity."

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We must struggle to make our whole society a society where love is dominant, not hatred and violence. Look what happened over this weekend — four terrorist killings, 34 people killed, 50 other people wounded in four different shootings in our country in one weekend. Have we really put on Christ when we allow our society to be filled

with such violence and hatred? We have to be careful that we're not caught up in the hatred that seems to be spoken so clearly, even by our president. It's a tragic situation, but we must be the ones who stand up for the way of Jesus. Peace, forgiveness, and love — these are of Christ, only these.

If we listen to St. Paul, we will find a way to change, transform our society into a society where there is peace and love and forgiveness. Then as Paul concludes this letter, it will become true for us. The peace of Christ will overflow in our hearts: "For to this end we were called to be one body." If we listen carefully to these words of God proclaimed to us today, try to act on them to change our lives in ways that are necessary, that peace of God will be first of all in our own hearts, in our own lives, and then it will spread in our country and in the world. We are the ones called to make that happen. Listen to what Jesus tells us, follow his way, and his peace will fill our hearts.

Editor's note: *This homily was given August 4 at St. Ambrose Church, Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan. 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.*