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by Thomas Gumbleton

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This past week, I received a copy of a newsletter that I subscribe to. It's called Compassion, and it's written by people on death row. Each month, they send out this newsletter with uplifting stories, anecdotes from that terrible place where they are on death row.

This week, one of the stories I found especially applicable to our Scripture lessons today. It's a story about a youngster. It starts:

> "Daddy, what does it look like?" The little girl pestered her father again. He was trying to read a magazine and relax. He described it to her again and then tried to shoo her away. But this time she pouted and crossed her arms, dissatisfied. "I want to see a picture," she said.
>
> He was still flipping through his magazine when he saw one, a map of the United States. He said, "Here, I'm going to make you a puzzle." And he tore out the page and then tore it into little pieces and gave it to her.
>
> She loved games. Thinking to buy himself some peace and quiet, he said, "Now go into the other room, and see if you can put it together correctly. Go sit at my desk. You can use my tape dispenser."
>
> Thrilled, the youngster ran from the room with her prize. Her father sighed. But about five minutes later, his daughter returned, "Daddy, Daddy." She handed back the map correctly fitted together, though the tape job was horrendous.
>
> Nevertheless, her father was surprised and impressed, and asked her, "How did you finish so quickly?" She said, "Oh, on the other side of the paper was a picture of Jesus. I know what he looks like. When I got all of Jesus back where he belonged, the country just came together." She was obviously very pleased with herself.

The author at the end says, "May we all be so wise."

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 19, 2020

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

Psalms 40

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

John 1:29-34

Of course, wise enough to put Jesus where he belongs, at the center of our life, listening to his words, watching how he acts, and trying to follow him. Today's lessons, I think in a very clear way, show us at least some part of what it means to follow Jesus. In the first lesson, we have that passage from Isaiah about the servant, the servant who is, as most Scripture commentators believe, a type of Jesus.

There are four songs about this servant. We heard one last week and today is the second. The servant had been sent by God to preach to the chosen people, to Jacob and Israel. But now God says that's not enough. "I want you to go to all the nations and proclaim the light of God, the word of God."

You remember that Jesus speaks about himself as, "I am the light of the world." This servant, who is a type of Jesus, is sent to all the nations to preach God's word.

It is very important to remember that Jesus, as John just declared in the Gospel, "Yes, I have seen and I declare that this is the Son of God, Jesus." We need to listen to him, to watch how he acts, and to follow him. Of the many things that we need to do, I think if we go back to last Sunday's Scriptures where we had the first Song of the Servant in this Book of Isaiah, perhaps you remember it. It's a very powerful passage.

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"Here is my servant, my chosen one in whom I delight. [God is speaking about this servant.] I have put my Spirit upon him and he will bring justice to the nations." He's going to bring God's kingdom into existence where there will be justice and peace and fullness of life for every person.

But listen carefully to how he's to bring that about. "He will not cry out or shout or raise his voice in the streets." In biblical terms, calling out in the street means a call to arms, to go to war. This servant will not do that. "War no, never again war," words of Pope Paul VI. That's what the servant is to proclaim.

"A crushed reed he will not break, and a wavering flame he will not quench." The servant will be gentle, peace-loving, careful with those who are vulnerable. The servant will not quench the wavering flame or break the bruised reed. Gentleness and love will be how the servant acts. Faithfully, he will establish justice on the earth.

We live in a world that's very broken, a world where there is violence within our own nation and other parts of the world even worse, perhaps. We're responsible for some of that violence.

We need to make sure we listen deeply to these words of the servant of God who is Jesus, and to make Jesus once more as this little girl expressed, "Put Jesus back where he belonged and the country just came together."

If each one of us puts Jesus where he belongs in my life, follow what we've heard about this servant who is a type or representative of Jesus, but then continue to follow each week in our Scriptures what Jesus says and does and follow him, put Jesus where he belongs in front of our eyes, listening to him, following him and perhaps, as that little girl did with those pieces of paper, we could put the world back together again in peace, harmony and love.

Editor's note: *This homily was given Jan. 19 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.*