

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 13, 2007 | The Peace Pulpit

Back in September 2001 after that terrible act of terrorism that took place in New York City, Pope John Paul II began to reflect on that incident and others like it in other parts of the world. And over the next couple of months, he began to put together his Peace Day statement for January 1, 2002. In that Peace Day statement he tells us or rather asks a very profound question, one which we continue to ask: "How can a world in which the power of evil seems once again to have the upper hand be transformed into a world in which the noblest aspirations of the human heart will triumph, a world in which true peace will prevail?" And further on he says, "I have often paused to reflect on this persistent question. How do we restore the moral and social order subjected to such horrific violence?"

Those are questions that challenge us just as they challenged Pope John Paul.

In the current climate in which we still live some few years later, we find that the power of evil stills seems to have the upper hand. And the moral order is shattered. We remember just within the last couple of weeks, the terrible bombing at the airport in Scotland. Or the aborted threats of terrorism in England. Or if we follow the news even this morning, we read about another horrendous truck bombing near Baghdad, 105 people killed, 240 terribly injured. Violence goes on and on and on. Our moral order seems to be shattered.

So how do we restore, how do we make peace prevail? The very peace which Jesus tells his disciples in today's gospel, "Proclaim, whatever house you go into say peace be upon this house and that peace will come."

But how do we make that happen? If we listen very carefully to today's scriptures, we will find the way that each of us can be part of the effort to make it happen. To make true peace prevail.

What was happening in today's gospel incident was Luke's second time of telling about disciples being sent out. Luke, Matthew and Mark all have an account of an incident where Jesus sends out the 12. But now it's different, it's 72. And this is significant for the people who read Luke's gospel in the very beginning, it might not be quite as significant for us. But 72 is the number of all the nations that are listed in the Book of Genesis after the flood. So it's all the nations of the world. At this point Jesus is now sending disciples symbolically to all the world. And he does it throughout all time. And so this morning as we listen, we're the ones who are being sent out into the world in which we live.

When Jesus sends the disciples and sends us, it's for a truly cosmic purpose. Because Jesus tells the disciples

that as they were going out proclaiming God's word, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven." You see you have been given the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, overcome all the power of the enemy.

Jesus puts this mission in those kinds of terms. His message is the message that can overcome the violence of the world in which we live.

And he sent those disciples to carry out that message and he sends us. The way it will happen is if we begin to become different from the world around us and the people in the world around us so often.

When Jesus sent those first disciples he told them, "Don't carry any extra purse; don't have any sandals, no walking stick." Part of that is simply that we have to be living a life of simplicity. But also anyone who would travel in that time of Jesus, in that part of the world, in the Holy Land, would truly look extraordinary and be noticed. Because people just would not travel without an extra bag of clothing to change into or without a walking stick, or without sandals in the rocky paths of Galilee and Judea. You couldn't do it. So anyone who was traveling like that would truly stand out. They would be different as disciples of Jesus. And so Jesus is urging us to be different, to stand out.

And we have some extraordinary examples of people who do stand out and that who do change the world. Transform a situation of violence into a situation of love.

I'm sure all of us remember the event that happened almost a year ago now last October, in that tiny town in Pennsylvania where a man who was obviously -- not necessarily evil but deranged -- went into a schoolhouse. He told most of the students and the teachers to go but kept 10 young girls. One of the youngsters begged him, "Don't kill the rest kill me." But he didn't listen to her and he shot all 10 of them. Five died, as you know, and five were terribly wounded.

But the aftermath of that event is what is so extraordinary. Those Amish people are followers of Jesus and they stand out by their way of life, for one thing. If we travel through Amish country, we always notice the people, because they're dressed differently. They follow a simplicity of life. But they stand out even more because of what they did after that event. The following week when the killer, who had killed himself, was being buried, the church of course was filled -- with family members, the widow and her three children, but almost all of the members in that congregation that day were from the Amish community. They had come to give comfort and strength to that widow and her three children. They used love to transform a terrible situation of violence into one of peace. It's amazing.

But that's how every Christian community should be. If we follow the way of Jesus, we have to reject violence, and then we can transform situations of violence into situations of love and peace.

And I think of another quite extraordinary example too. One that I think is really noteworthy. It's something that Pope Benedict is about to do. In October of this year, he is going to beatify an Austrian peasant, Franz Jägerstätter. Probably most of us never heard of him. But Franz grew up not very far from where Joseph Ratzinger grew up. Joseph Ratzinger went into the Nazi army, became a soldier. Franz Jägerstätter refused to serve in the army, refused to kill. And of course he paid a price for it. He was beheaded on Aug. 9, 1943. But now he's going to be proclaimed before the world as one who faithfully followed Jesus.

And it's such a contrast and I think there's great courage on the part of Pope Benedict. Because it's so easy to see the difference. Joseph Ratzinger now our Holy Father followed Hitler's orders went into the army, prepared to kill. Franz Jägerstätter refused and now is proclaimed a saint, one for us to imitate and to follow.

[Editor's Notes: 1)This homily was delivered at St. Alexander Parish, Farmington Hills, Mich. 2) Jesuit Fr. John Dear traveled to Austria and met with Franziska Jägerstätter -- wife of martyred Franz. Read about it here: [Franziska and Franz Jägerstätter](#) [1]]

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