

## Homily on the beatification of Franz Jägerstätter

Thomas Gumbleton | Nov. 1, 2007 | The Peace Pulpit

**[Editor's Note:** Bishop Gumbleton delivered this homily in Austria on Sept. 23. He was part of events leading up to the beatification of Franz Jägerstätter. A report of the beatification, which happened Oct. 26, will be available in the next issue of NCR.]

As always, when we listen to God's word in the midst of our weekly Eucharist, we must try to listen within the context of what is happening in our lives. A month from now, according to the declaration of Pope Benedict, Franz Jägerstätter will be declared blessed, to be venerated by the whole church as one whose example we can follow and whose intercession we can seek.

So this evening, we try to listen to God's word, reflecting on the life, the witness of Franz Jägerstätter. The gospel lesson might seem to present us with great difficulty because Jesus seems to be suggesting that we follow the example of a dishonest person. In the story the man is commended by the master for his dishonest actions.

It's clear that the first community of disciples struggled over this lesson because at the end of the lesson in the gospel, we have these sayings of Jesus, particularly, "You cannot serve two masters. Either you love one and hate the other or you despise one and love the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon." As those first Christians struggled over this gospel lesson, they began to understand that there are two realms.

There is the realm of serving God and the realm of serving the world around us. If we are committed to serving the realm of the world, the realm of wealth, power and prestige, then we may, within that framework, be dishonest-do whatever it takes to achieve our goals. But if we are determined to hear Jesus and follow him, then we recall his words: "The reign of God is at hand. Change your lives, take up your cross and follow me."

Within the realm of Jesus as we follow him, dishonesty, cheating, exploitation, such as we heard condemned in the first lesson tonight by the prophet Amos, would never be appropriate. Surely in the life of Franz Jägerstätter, we find someone who was determined to live within the realm of God, the realm of Jesus. Franz Jägerstätter would have nothing to do with the realm of the world in which he lived, where barbarism of the inhuman and Godless system of Nazism prevailed.

Franz Jägerstätter was quick to reject the social, the racial delusions of Nazism, its ideology and its deification of the state. Franz Jägerstätter surely was not like the dishonest steward; he was faithful to the way of Jesus. He could hear the words of the prophet Amos saying, "Never exploit the poor, never exploit the weak, never condemn those who are different from you by race or ethnicity."

Franz Jägerstätter was quick to follow Jesus and to follow the ways that the prophet Amos suggested, by never exploiting the poor, never seeking to dominate over others, never destroying others because of their race. But it wasn't only in rejecting the way of the world or the realm of the world that Franz Jägerstätter gives us extraordinary witness. If we listen deeply to the parable that Jesus tells, we find not just a negative application, but one that is very positive.

We must remind ourselves that this parable comes immediately after the parable we heard last Sunday. Those parables, that of the prodigal son and the loving father, who was almost irrational in his love for that son, show us a God whose love for us is without limit, show us a God who is always searching us out, running out to meet us, to forgive us, to embrace us with love.

This evening's parable we might almost think of as a parable showing us the master who loves the servant so much, that in spite of the servant's dishonesty, the master forgives and does not punish, but draws the servant to himself. That is the amazing love of God for each one of us, a love without limit, a love without condition, a love that always searches us out to forgive and to heal us.

Of course, there is nowhere that love of God is made more clear than in Jesus. In writing to the church at Corinth, Saint Paul tells those Christians: "I was not sent to baptize, but to proclaim the good news of Jesus, a message that cannot be spoken in terms of human wisdom." Paul goes on to say, "Here am I, preaching a crucified Christ, weak, helpless, tortured," and yet a Christ who forgives and who loves.

This kind of love is so incredible, so unbelievable, that Saint Paul goes on to tell the Christians at Corinth: "To the Jews it's a scandal and to the Greeks it's foolishness," yet that is how God loves each one of us, and what God expects from us in return is that we love God with all the power of our spirit and that we love one another as God loves us.

Paul concludes that passage by telling us that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. What God is telling us tonight is that if we begin to live with that kind of weakness and that kind of foolishness, if we're willing to love without limit, to forgive and love even our enemies, if we are ready to accept suffering rather than inflict suffering, if we are ready to be killed rather than kill, we can change our world.

It can become the reign of God where peace will prevail for all. Is this not the witness of Franz Jägerstätter, one who was willing to be killed rather than kill, to accept suffering rather than inflict suffering? Is not his witness the kind of witness we need in a world where there is so much violence, so much killing, where war is accepted?

Franz Jägerstätter teaches us the way of Jesus. Give your life for others, even for your enemies. Surely this is a powerful witness, and one that challenges every one of us here tonight to give up war, to give up hatred, to give up killing, to follow the way of Jesus. A month from now, in the cathedral of Lintz, Franz Jägerstätter will be declared blessed within our church.

Perhaps we should anticipate that marvelous occasion tonight by making our prayer as we try to listen to God's

word: "Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, thank you for your witness and help us to follow your way, which is the way of Jesus, the way of love, the way that can bring peace to our world."

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