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Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

by Thomas Gumbleton

The Peace Pulpit

[**Editor's Note:** Jan. 21 was Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's last Mass as pastoral administrator of St. Leo Parish in Detroit. (See note at bottom of this column.) Bishop Gumbleton and *NCR* are committed to continuing to post the Peace Pulpit. Stay tuned as we work out the details of how to do that now that the bishop does not have a regular pulpit from which to preach.]

Address before the beginning of Mass:

I welcome all of you here today especially parish members, but also guests that are with us, and thank you all for coming. At the very beginning, I apologize for the letter [from Cardinal Maida saying that Bishop Gumbleton would be replaced the next day] that I'm sure stunned many of you as you picked it up this morning. I had not seen that letter myself until today, so it's a bit of a surprise to all of us.

I think it's important to make one correction in the letter because it seems to indicate that it's just a normal thing for bishops to be relieved of their parishes, but when I wrote my letter of resignation as a bishop I wrote that to Pope Benedict and as every priest in the diocese, I wrote a separate letter to Cardinal Maida resigning from the parish but with the understanding, I put in the letter, that I would remain as administrator on a year-by-year basis as some of my classmates are -- priests even older than I -- so it's certainly not my will. I did not choose to leave St. Leo's. It's something that was forced upon me and I apologize to all of you.

I'm sure that it's because of the openness with which I spoke out last January concerning victims of sex abuse in the church. So we're all suffering the consequences of that and yet, I don't regret doing what I did because I still think it was the right thing to do for the benefit ? [Sustained applause] You're going to make it harder and harder if you keep that up. So anyway, we do have to go on with this liturgy ...

Homily:

As I mentioned when I introduced the first reading, those people who had gathered where they were rebuilding the temple, took a half a day to listen to God's Word, so I'm going to presume on your patience and read a little bit more of God's Word today, but you're not standing and it won't be for half a day.

There's a passage in the book of the Acts of the Apostles that is very appropriate for us to think about today and to add into our reflection on God's Word. Paul is finishing up his journey, he took three long missionary journeys and this is his last one, in fact he's on his way to Jerusalem where he's going to be put on trial and jailed and later executed. But at this point, St. Luke, who wrote this book also, tells us that:

From Miletus, Paul sent word to Ephesus summoning members of the church. When they came to him, he addressed them, 'You know how I lived among you from the first day I set foot in the province of Asia. How I served the Lord in humility through the sorrows and trials that the enemy caused me. You know that I never held back from doing anything that could be useful for you. I spoke publicly and in your homes and I urged Jews and non-Jews alike to turn to God and believe in our Lord Jesus. But now I am going to Jerusalem, impelled by the Spirit, without knowing what will happen to me there. Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock the Holy Spirit has placed into your care. Shepherd the Church of the Lord which Jesus has won at the price of his own blood. And now I commend you to God and to his grace-filled Word which is able to make you grow and gain the inheritance that you shall share with all the saints.' Now after this discourse Paul knelt down with them and prayed. Then they all began to weep and threw their arms around him and kissed him. And then they went with him even to the ship.

It was very difficult, obviously, for Paul to leave those people whom he loved so much and who loved him so much, and we're in that same kind of situation today. I am leaving, and I leave with great gratitude for all of you, for all that you have meant to me over the years. I leave, however, with a determination not to be gone really. You know Paul had it a lot worse. He was going to jail, at least that's not where I'm going -- for the time being anyway. (Laughter) And so I'm not really expecting to be cut off from any of you or all of you. I'm going to be living very close by, my telephone number is the same and I'll continue to come by here whenever it's possible, and eventually I'm sure that there will be Sundays where I'll be able to celebrate the Eucharist here again, so it's not a complete departure. It's not truly a final ending.

And so I ask you to think very hard about what Paul said in that second lesson today, and pray about it. "You are the Body of Christ." It's not I, not Cardinal Maida, *you* are the Body of Christ. And I hope that after these twenty some years that we've been together that that has been one thing that has really happened, that through our celebration of the Liturgy of the Word together and the Eucharist, we have become really unified, bonded in love and commitment to the message of Jesus and have become the

Body of Christ.

As the Body of Christ, it's very important to pay special attention to today's Gospel. This was a very important event in the life of Jesus and it really identified who Jesus is and what his message is and what his mission is. If you're the Body of Christ then it identifies who you are, what your mission is, what you must be about.

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I think it becomes more clear how important this passage is when we back up a little bit in the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel, even into the third chapter. We discover that shortly before this, Jesus had been baptized and as he left the water of the Jordan River and went apart to pray, Luke tells us that he experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit -- a very powerful experience for Jesus -- and he heard, in his heart and in his spirit, God speaking, "You are my Son, my chosen one, in whom I am well pleased." Now Jesus is one who knew the Scriptures and knew that that was the first line of the 42nd chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah -- the part that goes on to say, "You are my chosen one in whom I am well pleased. You will bring true justice to the nation," and the passage says that he will do it in a very special way because, "You will not break the bruised reed or quench the wavering flame." In other words, this chosen one is to bring justice, but through healing, through love, through nurturing.

It's a very important understanding that Jesus received about himself, but it was very challenging, as it would be for any of us, to think that we must always try to bring justice but without violence, without hatred, without putting down the people to whom we're speaking to make justice happen. We have to transform unjust situations through nurturing, through love. Because it was so challenging for Jesus, he went apart. This is the next thing that happened in his life. He went apart and spent 40 days and 40 nights in deep prayer, deep communion with God where, as you know because these parts of the Gospel are so familiar to us, he confronted evil in a very dramatic way and he was tested to try to use power, prestige, wealth and armies to become a leader a great worldly power. He was tempted to bring about justice through those means, but he rejected all those temptations.

When he came back, then, after those six weeks, he came back to Nazareth, his hometown, and went into the synagogue. That's when he stood up to read the passage that we heard today. "The Spirit of God is upon me. God sends me to proclaim good news to the poor, to give the blind new sight, to heal the broken-hearted, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim God's year of favor" -- a time when the reign of God breaks forth, where all debts are forgiven, where wealth is redistributed, where everyone lives in harmony and peace. Jesus proclaimed those words and then as we heard Luke describe it, "he sat down and all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him." That's when he said, "This day this passage is fulfilled as you listen." He's saying so clearly, "This is who I am. I am the One that has experienced God's Spirit. I am the One that is sent to proclaim good news to the poor, to bring true justice into the world."

So Jesus sets about his mission, his work, but as we all know, he began to gather followers, disciples, who became his Body, who are called to carry on his work. You are that Body of Christ today -- all of us together. So it's our task to do this very thing that Jesus proclaims so powerfully in that synagogue at Nazareth. We have to bring true justice. We have to make God's year of favor happen -- the time of peace

and unity.

Of course, it's a difficult task. It was for Jesus -- to do it always out of love and in the spirit of love.

There are so many ways in which we need to work for justice so we can rid our world of violence. Just this past week, we heard once more about the terrible things that are happening in Iraq. Perhaps you've read the report that the United Nations released about the fact that during this one year -- 2006 -- 34,000 Iraqis were killed -- more than 10 times the number of people killed in the World Trade Towers attack which was so traumatic for us. Think what it means. These are not military people, these are men, women, tiny children, being blown apart, being killed in a war that is clearly unjust, totally wrong, not only because of all the killing and that 34,000 this past year -- it's only a tiny amount of the total number that have been killed in Iraq since 1991 -- the first war, 12 1/2 years of sanctions, now a second war, 3 1/2 years. When will it end? When enough of us demand that it ends! This is what it means to work for justice and for peace.

There will be demonstrations because we're coming close to the anniversary of the beginning of this second war and more and more people are going to be out in the streets protesting. That is one of the ways that we try to work for peace. We make our voices heard, so we must commit ourselves to do that.

Of course, another aspect of the injustice of this war -- and this was also reported this week -- we are spending, out of the resources that we have, \$200 billion a year to wage war, to kill, to destroy. That's \$4 billion a week. One article that I read about this indicated that of that \$200 billion, we could use \$35 billion, a small part of the total, and could educate all the three- and four-year-olds in this country; give preschool education to every youngster in our country. That is something that is dramatically needed, but we waste our resources on things that are unjust and violent.

It's time that we really committed ourselves, as the people of God, as the Body of Christ, to do what Jesus came to do, what he meant when said, "This day this scripture passage is fulfilled," now we must understand that it is fulfilled in us. We are the Body of Christ, in not only those ways that I suggested, but other ways we have to continue to look around us to see where there's injustice, where there's evil, where there's violence. We have to work to change it. That's what we're called to do.

So my hope and my prayer today is that all of us will have a deeper awareness that we are the Body of Christ and that we carry on his work, and that you, the people of St. Leo's, who have done this so marvelously over these past years, that you'll continue to do it and even more than ever before, that you'll make it clear that you understand that you are the Body of Christ and that you are carrying out his work and that you will commit yourselves to continue this. We, as this parish community, must carry on the work of Jesus, and so I trust that that's what you will do even as I leave you.

Editor's Note: Over the last week, *NCR* published online three stories about Bishop Gumbleton. The first two stories contain video clips.

- Gumbleton's replacement named in Detroit parish

- Advocacy for sex abuse victims cost him his job, Gumbleton says
 - Detroit archdiocese responds to Gumbleton removal stories
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