

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

LIVING TRUE LOVE

SUNDAY READINGS:

Ezekiel 33:7-9

Psalms 95:1-2,6-9

Romans 13: 8-10

Matthew 18: 15-20

COMMENTARY

How appropriate are these readings in our reality! Mercy, understanding, listening, welcoming, forgiving, loving beyond any measure are all needed in our world today. I came across a quote from one of Dr. Martin Luther King's sermons which I share with all of you: we "must see that force begets force, hate begets hate, toughness begets

toughness. And it is all a descending spiral, ultimately ending in destruction for all and everybody. Somebody must have sense enough and morality enough to cut off the chain of hate and the chain of evil in the universe. And you do that by love."

This, indeed, is the message of the readings. It is a call to love, to have compassion, to seek reconciliation, and restoration. Are we Catholics able to show love and compassion so as to experience a deep and true reconciliation? Restoration means to restore the relationships that have been broken. It is not just "giving back" something that was stolen. In some cases that might be fairly easy, but to heal a broken relationship demands much more work and effort. It demands walking the other mile and turning the other cheek, of giving our other tunic or returning a much better one. The above phrases that come from Jesus are so different from the ones that are quoted from the Old Testament: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." That is not what Jesus taught.

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I would also like to share a short reflection from Karen Clifton, a lay woman who has worked against the death penalty in Houston, Texas and that intersected with Sr. Helen Prejean, CSJ. “Making decisions in an arbitrary way (a way that creates winners and losers) rather than by consensus is not restorative. We all need to use restorative practices in our daily lives—with our families, in our workplaces, and especially in our churches. There are powerful examples of this. Those who have walked the path toward forgiveness despite having experienced some of the greatest hurt imaginable are evidence of the way mercy can heal our heart and minds and strengthen our faith.”

We come back to Paul’s letter. In the end love must be the energy behind all of our efforts for reconciliation. This is our mission in life: to love as Jesus loved. To live with compassion that reaches out no matter the cost, because this is the cost of discipleship.

NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-9

The prophet is explaining to his people the seriousness of his duty as a prophet as given to him by God. For someone who is called, God expects a complete commitment to God’s will. We know that the Hebrew Scriptures come from a different historical and cultural time. We need not fear death if we fail to correspond to God’s will, but we must be completely dedicated to that which we know is God’s will for us.

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Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2,6-9

The psalmist has a similar cry in today's liturgy. May our hearts never harden or turn away from the voice, the will of God. Joy will be ours even in difficulty because God dwells within us. Divine mercy is limitless and eternal.

Second Reading: Romans 13: 8-10

St. Paul gives us the key to acting in the true way that God wishes by remembering the teaching of Jesus, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If our actions conform to this norm, then we will never purposely hurt or abuse our neighbor. Loving is not always easy. It is challenging; it demands humility and patience. However, there is no sure remedy other than true love to reconcile with others.

Gospel: Matthew 18: 15-20

Jesus teaches us another facet of reaching reconciliation. First we talk and listen to the person who has wronged us. If necessary, the circle of listening widens but only with those people who are trustworthy. Jesus recognizes that not everyone will repent even if this process was used. Our Church, which has been given the authority to decide on matters, speaks today of restorative, which can be another way of bringing back with love and mercy those who err.

Notes and Commentary by Sr. Nancy Schramm, OSF. Sr. Nancy is a past-president of the USCMA and currently serves in a small rural parish. She also serves her religious community on various committees. She is a spiritual director and translates for other groups in Portuguese.

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