

13th Sunday Ordinary Time – Cycle C

If you read thru the New Testament, it's pretty obvious that there was no love lost between the Jews and the Samaritans....There are differing opinions as to why these 2 groups resented and hated each other so much, but they did, and it had been going on for 700 yrs before Jesus. ...Today's Gospel passage tells of a day when Jesus and His disciples were on the receiving end of that hatred...Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to carry out the final part of His mission, which would eventually lead to His passion, death and resurrection....Their journey took them through a Samaritan town where they had planned to stop and rest, but the people of the town wouldn't let them stay there because they were Jews...James and John took the rejection very hard, and they wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven and turn the town and everyone in it into ashes....But Jesus would have no part of that...Instead, He chewed out His two hot-headed disciples, and started out for another town...In doing this, Jesus showed His disciples what He meant in His Sermon on the Mount when He said, "If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn and offer him the other cheek."

That day in Samaria, Jesus accepted insult without retaliating because He knew that the only way to break the vicious cycle of hatred was for someone to refuse to strike back...He lived out this principle many times in His life, most powerfully as he hung on the cross...It is a principle that most of us have a hard time believing – at least believing it strongly enough to put it into practice.

Dr. Martin Luther King was one who believed it and lived it... One night, his home was burned down by a mob of white men who did not like his message about the equality of the races...The situation after the fire was extremely dangerous.... A crowd of Dr. King's friends and supporters had gathered at the scene and some of them talked about getting guns, and others talked about getting gasoline and setting fire to the homes of all the white people in the area so that they could suffer like the black people had suffered...That angry crowd wanted to hurt those who had hurt them; they wanted to hurt those who had destroyed Dr. King's home; they wanted to hurt their enemies.

That's a pretty natural reaction isn't it?...We all feel like hitting back when we are hit...We all feel like returning insult for insult... When someone hurts us, our first instinct is to get back at them, make them hurt as much as they hurt us...get even....get revenge...you know, the ancient "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" rule of conduct...That night however did not end up that way. Instead the crowd left their enemies in peace and they went home determined to win the victory with votes instead of with guns, with politics instead of with fire, with love instead of hate...One of the things that Martin Luther King told the crowd that night to calm them down was this: "When you live by the rule "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, you will end up with a nation of blind and toothless people".

Martin Luther King was a person who tried to live by the gospel of Jesus Christ – a gospel in which Jesus tells us that if we are to be His followers, He wants us to respond differently...He wants us to forget about getting even. He wants us to break that cycle of "you hurt me, now I'll hurt you,"..."your words ripped me, now my words are going to rip you."...Because all that does is raise the hatred and anger and resentment to a higher level...And hatred is like acid: it not only destroys the object it is poured on, it also eats away at the container that holds it...My friends, there has to be something different about us, about being a follower of Christ....If we're like everyone else, if we love only those who love us, then what's the big deal about being Christian?... Why don't we just forget it, pack up and go home?

You know, we come here every week - some of us even come every day...We listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed and preached...We hear what Jesus wants us to do...We hear how He wants us to be. ...how he wants us to live...We receive Him in the Eucharist. ...We take His Body and Blood into our own bodies...He becomes part of us, so that when we leave here and go back into the world, we can bring Him with us...out there, where He wants to be, and needs to be...That's what is supposed to happen...But does it?

Let me illustrate with an old parable....I've used it before, but it's worth using again because it's message is so true:...It's about a congregation of geese: the 1st Geese Church of Christ...It was at their Sunday morning service, and the pastor waddled up to the pulpit and began his fiery sermon ... "What kind of birds are we?" he asked the congregation....They answered, "Geese!" ... "That's right!" the pastor shot back... "We are geese! God made us geese...not ducks or sparrows or crows...Let me hear an AMEN" ... "AMEN!" they shouted...honking their approval..."And what are these things God has given us, these MAJESTIC appendages?" ... "Wings!" they answered ... "And why did God give us these fine wings?" ... "To fly, pastor! We can fly with them!" ...Now the preacher really started to heat up..."God WANTS us to fly. The moles can dig, the lions can hunt, but WE can fly!...We can soar above the clouds! We can fill the skies. Praise the Lord! We can fly!"...

"AMEN!" they shouted, "ALLELUIA!" ...Then the pastor challenged his flock..."If God wants us to fly, then what do we gotta do?"....."We gotta fly!" they yelled back... "We gotta what?" "We gotta fly!".... "What?"... "FLY!"....Then, when the service was over as the congregation of geese were leaving the church, they remarked to one another how very inspiring the pastor's sermon had been that morning.....AND THEN,they all WALKED home....They all WALKED home.

You see what can happen? So often, we're like those geese in the parable...We walk out of here no different than we were when we walked in...We leave here with no sense of having a mission from GodThose geese were given the mission to fly - to soar above the clouds, to fill the skies – because that's what God made geese to do....We have been given the mission to bring the love of Christ out into the world, because that's what God made us to do...and we are the only ones who can do it...The Pope can make speeches and write encyclicals 'til the cows cum home; ...bishops can confirm and ordain and punch out pastoral letters until the computer's bytes run out; ..priests can offer the Sacrament of the Mass from dawn 'til dusk;...deacons can teach and preach 'til their tongues fall off, ... but only you can bring Christ's love to your brothers and sisters out there in the real, day to day world where you live,... where you work, where you play, where you shop, ... where you go to school, where you just hang out...When it comes to bringing Christ's love into the trenches, you are the frontline troops...That's YOUR mission.

And it's certainly not an easy one, because the love Christ is calling you - and me - to give, is one that requires us –in His words - to “love our enemies” and “do good to those who hate us” and “bless those who curse us” and “pray for those who mistreat us” and “forgive those who hurt us...not once, but 70 X 7 times” and “love those who don't love us in return.”...All easy stuff, right?....But, that's the love Jesus says must be the identifying mark of all who believe in Him...the love He modeled for us.

The challenge Christ presents to all Christians is radical...revolutionary...because it goes against the world's way of doing business...It's illogical...it's risky...It takes courage...Like one of my high school religion students put it: "It takes a lot more courage to turn the other cheek than it does to strike back."...He was right...We can get hurt...We can get taken advantage of...Yes, that's all true...What's also true is that this is the only kind of love that will grab the world's attention...It's the only kind of love that can make a difference...the only kind of love that has any chance to break the vicious cycle of hatred, anger, violence that goes on day after day....not

only between nations and races and religions, but between people like you and me, people in all walks of life.

My friends, every morning when we wake up, put our feet over the side of the bed and place them on the floor, we have to make a choice: "Do I live my life today by the world's standards,...or do I live it by Jesus' standards?"...It's not easy to choose Jesus' way...I know I can't do it without His help...I don't think you can...That's why we need to be here...We need to feel His presence, feel His strength, ...especially as He comes to us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion...Filled with His presence,...filled with His strength...we'll be able to say to Him as we leave here, "Lord, look,...this goose ain't walkin; this goose can fly!"...AMEN._