

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - The Gift of Reconciliation

February 16, 2020

There is a story of a married couple who argue frequently. They have been married for 40 years. Both have strong characteristics and were quick to temper. One evening they were engaged in yet another heated and emotionally charged conversation. The wife, reaching a point of no return, decided to pack a few things and walk away. While packing, her husband placed another suitcase next to hers and started packing as well. With a huff, she asked him, “*Where in the world are you going?*” Her husband responded, in an angry tone, “*I don’t know. I am going wherever you are going!*”.

Immediately after His Baptism and following the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew, presents a discourse of moral teachings we have come to know as “**The Sermon on the Mount.**” This Sunday’s Gospel (Matthew 5:17-37) is a portion of these instructions. Jesus eloquently presents a series of specific law of Moses and contrasts them with a renewed way of looking at these matters. He begins these laws with, “*You have heard that it was said,*” and concludes with, “*but I say to you*”; thus, presenting the true intent of the law through the lens of His message and sets the standards for all Christians. As **St. Augustine of Hippo** stated in his book “**Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount**”: “*if anyone, will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian Life.*”

One of those standards highlighted in the Gospel is **reconciliation**. “*Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*”

(Matthew 5:23-25) Jesus, through specific examples, shares with His disciples the negative impact of unresolved and conflictive human interactions, offering at the same time a mechanism for accountability and a path towards mending broken relationships. For **real reconciliation** to occur, we must not only meditate and identify the offence, but also **value the relationship that may be jeopardized by such offence. It requires openness of heart to engage in dialogue and to seek the restoration of that particular relationship.** God desires for us to live in relationship with one another. When our relationships are broken, our lives may become off-balance and we will not be able to function normally and fully.

Broken relationships separate us from one another and, in some ways, from God. At times, we are oblivious to the impact of our actions in the life of others. Our intent may be genuine or without malice, but the impact on others may be devastating. Pride may also play a significant role, impeding us from reconciling with those whom we love and love us, and from those who differ from us. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbours as ourselves. We are called to build bridges, not walls. Nowadays, any difference in opinions could cause a visible divide among families, friends, and communities. It is practically a common occurrence to hear friends “de-friending” or “not following” each other’s pages in social media as a result of political debates or opposing points of views about relevant and challenging topics. How may we find common ground in the midst of our differences? How may we, even during challenging and uncertain times, create space for dialogue and reconciliation? Jesus came to this world to reconcile us with God. **It is that ministry of reconciliation that encourages us to create space for healthy and productive dialogue and urges us to remain faithful to our vocation of love where we reject sin while embracing the sinner.**

Empathy is the ability to take on the perspective of another person while staying out of judgment, recognizing the emotions in other people. It is a skill that can bring people together and make people feel included. As Brene Brown, an author and researcher once said: “Empathy feels connection while sympathy drives disconnection. Empathy is a choice and it is a vulnerable choice.” We can choose to nurture our divides and remain in a state of tension and dissension, or, we may decide to be open to the movement of the Spirit and focus on that which unites us, God’s love for humanity, and work together

through our disagreements. Similar to the case of the married couple, our disagreements, political or not, are not sufficient ground to separate us. We are bonded by something greater. Avoidance of contact is a defence mechanism we may use to evade our responsibility to foster reconciliation and unity.

Reconciliation is hard work. It is holy work. As a church, we have a unique opportunity to become bridge-builders instead of wall-erectors. **We have a chance to exercise our prophetic voices in powerful and unique ways while we spread and teach the gift of reconciliation.**

Jesus, our model, faced confrontations with determination and compassion. It is a healthy and necessary balance to mend and maintain challenging relationships. Jesus's determination ensured that the dignity of every human being was respected. His compassion showed God's love to those who were difficult to love. Jesus invites us to relate to God and each other in a new way. He does not lay down rules and regulations for every situation in life but asks us to check our inner attitudes, our motivation.

Let's find holy balance in these challenging times to maintain a reconciliatory tone while challenging the injustices against God's children in a way that foster dialogue and build bridges. Not an easy task, but a necessary one. Amen.