

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time C - "Do to others as you would have them do to you,"
February 20, 2022

We are bombarded with media and advertisers telling us that, in order to have a happy life, we need to be wealthy, to be popular or to have power to control others by whatever means it takes. Last week, I read an article ***Conscience goes silent in truckers blockade*** by Glen Argan, former editor of Western Catholic Reporter, that my former diaconate formation instructor Bernadette shared in Facebook. Here are some quotes: ***"The word conscience" has lost its bite, its association with the courage to stand for good in the face of evil. In our self-centred universe, it has taken on the opposite meaning. Many now feel free to say they are following their conscience when what they mean is that they will do what they please, without considering the needs and rights of others. ... Western society is in a state of moral collapse, and one of the clearest signs of that is the Canadian truckers blockade. ... We will not be free until we respect moral truth and place that truth above our self-centred notions of freedom"***.

BTW, for the first time in Canadian history, the federal government is enacting the Emergencies Act, declaring a public order emergency, to bring the ongoing trucker convoy protests and blockades to an end. With each illegal blockade, local law enforcement agencies have been acting to keep the peace within their jurisdiction. Despite their best efforts, it is clear that there are serious challenges to law enforcement's ability to effectively enforce the law. **"Right now the situation requires additional tools not held by any other federal, provincial, or territorial law. Today, in these circumstances, it is now clear that responsible leadership requires us to do this,"** Trudeau, the prime minister said on Monday, calling it a "last resort."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, whether you agree to the action of the the Canadian federal government or not, I leave it to your conscience. But what does this mean for us followers of Jesus? If we want to be a free people, we must reflect on whether our actions reflect obedience to a higher power — our Lord. How have I treated others? Do I put my own desires above the needs of the community? Do my actions reflect love? Love is not a feeling but the active willingness to serve others, the golden rule being, **"Do to others as you would have them do to you,"** (Luke 6:31) This Sunday's readings remind us that Our Lord has taught us a truly human way of living, giving us an example in his earthly life so that we gradually learn to treat others not necessarily as they treat us, but as how Our Lord would treat them.

In the First Reading (1 Samuel 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23) not-yet-King David was being pursued by King Saul and his army because Saul was envious of David and knew he would deprive him of his throne. David and his men sneaked up to Saul and his army while all were asleep. This is the second time David had a chance to ambush and kill Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 24). David spared his life to show his loyalty. Now Saul was pursuing him again, and David's servant Abishai was urging him to do what he should have done the first time: slay his enemy while he had the chance. David simply would not kill the Lord's anointed one. However, he did take away Saul's spear and water jug to prove to Saul that he meant him no harm. David knew, and teaches us, that if we seek justice, we must remember that it is for the Lord to mete it out, not us.

In the Second Reading (1 Corinthians 15:45-49) St. Paul reminds us that we have been made in the image and likeness of God and are called to show it. The first pages of Sacred Scripture teach us that Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26-27). Then they fell hard. Even the fallen humanity ushered in by Adam and Eve reflected God, but it also gave him a "bad name" in Creation. Not only was the image and likeness disfigured in them, but they were too wounded and weak to restore it. Enter the new Adam: **Jesus Christ, who**

not only showed us the true image and likeness of God to which we are called, but filled us with his Spirit so that we are capable of restoring it and living it through a life of grace, transforming a simply “earthly” life gradually into a “heavenly one.” With the Incarnation of Our Lord, we see that image and likeness taking flesh to show us what it means to be in the image and likeness of God. If a transformation in the Spirit is supposed to be taking place within us, then it should be reflected in our actions and attitudes toward others.

In today's Gospel (Luke 6:27-38) the continuing of the Sermon on the Plain, our Lord teaches us how we should respond to being mistreated, a response aided by grace and the Spirit, rising above the fallen earthly attitude of just responding in kind. If David in today's First Reading simply respected King Saul and wished him no harm, Our Lord teaches us more: to **love our enemies**. We were all enemies of Our Lord when he died for us (cf. Romans 5:8-11). He was subjected to blows, scourging, spitting, and ridicule and didn't respond in kind. He was stripped of his clothing, and his life was taken from him. He teaches us to **Do to others as you would have them do to you**” and qualifies that by saying we should not only **love those who love us, but also those who hate us, insult us and harm us**. Today's Gospel challenges the disciples and us to think beyond the culture of violence in which they lived. Luke is writing to the communities of Gentile Christians in Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor. A question for this community was: Could they be both Christians and good citizens of the empire in which they lived? Systems of ethical teachings circulated widely throughout Greco-Roman and Jewish societies during Jesus' life and the first centuries of early Christian tradition. Luke's theme of discipleship is clear and has Jesus going even beyond the ethical standards of the day. Jesus is calling for a radical re-ordering of our lives, **instead of retaliation, we are to demonstrate generosity of the heart by seeing beyond our hurts and injustices. Forgiveness is about removing the barriers which block the flow of love and damage friendly personal relationships. There is nothing passive about Jesus' aggressive commitment to non-violence and his repudiation of using wealth and privilege as power over others.**

As disciples, we are not asked to roll over and accept violence; instead, Jesus lists the ways we may be attacked and then tells us to actively do something additional, something that those who oppose us do not expect. **Non-violent action directly combats the dark underbelly of materialism and hostility**. The life of late Desmond Tutu, the beloved archbishop of South Africa also showed us numerous examples of non-violent response, especially in his longstanding work of opposing the state-sponsored racism known as *apartheid* in his native South Africa. Jesus, of course, gives us other examples in the Gospel reading today.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, an individual making a non-violent response makes a difference, a group of people does even more. This is where our behaviour as disciples is key. Both Jesus and the late Archbishop Tutu teach us how to actively counter violence with non-violence. What would the world look like if we actually did this as individuals, groups, and communities? People notice how and when we respond to the violence and corruption of the world around us. When we reaffirm our Baptismal vows in the words of the Baptismal Covenant, we say that we will persevere in resisting evil and that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbours as ourselves. This is our call to action. May we follow Jesus now as disciples in this modern world, transforming it with God's help. AMEN.