

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A)

Ezekiel 33: 7-9 Romans 13: 8-10 Matthew 18: 15-20

By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

[Prenote:

During these weeks in September, “First Impressions” reflections are written by one of the Dominican lay and religious participants in the “FAST FOR PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE” at Union Square in New York City. The fast is in its second week and today’s reflection is by Jane Abell, OP, a Houston Dominican. If you want more information on the fast: www.dominicanfastforpeace.org]

The Gospel is proclaimed today as our nation awaits the 1st anniversary of September 11, 2001. To recall the painful memories of that fateful morning is to tread on Sacred Ground: shattered lives, broken dreams, confusion, fear, courage and yes, hope, in the spontaneous outpouring of the goodness of which the human person is capable.

Multiple commemorations will be observed throughout our country. No matter the form of commemoration, we will all grieve for every precious life lost. Attention will be drawn to courageous firefighters and policemen who put their lives on the line as well as ordinary citizens who rushed to give their blood or offer help wherever needed. Some will highlight the military battle in Afghanistan. Others will ask, “Is there another way?” “Families for a Peaceful Tomorrow,” whose members lost loved ones in the massive destruction which crumbled the twin towers, visualize September 11th. as a time for communities around the world to unite in the shared honoring of those who lost their lives and in the exploration of what it will take to create peaceful tomorrows. Their expressed hope is that our diverse voices will come together to say, “another world is possible.” Their invitation is come, let us listen, let us search together.

The gospel today reflects Matthew’s concern for his local Christian community, mostly Jewish, but gaining Gentile converts. Matthew wrote out of the experience of the early church, in which inevitably, differences and conflicts arose. He saw a need for guidelines for the difficult work of resolving conflict and restoring broken relationships. He framed the teaching of Jesus to this end. Jesus reminds us

that the first step toward reconciliation is listening (cf. Quotable below). He urges us to employ all possible means to achieve mending of broken relationships, restoration to community and ultimately, healing and forgiveness. If consultation with one or two others fails, then seek the wisdom of the whole community. Even if exclusion is considered as a last option, the general tone of the gospels, which portray Jesus as the friend of sinners, tax-collectors and outcasts must be taken into account. These are the people with whom Jesus freely associates. .

The Gospel challenges us today in the context of our present experience; a Christian community, which knows itself as part of a global and interdependent world in which, increasingly, war and violence are the chosen means of resolving conflict. Is another world possible?

The Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, wrote a few weeks after September 11,

“The root of terrorism is misunderstanding, hatred, and violence. This root cannot be located by the military. Bombs and missiles cannot reach it, let alone destroy it. Only with the practice of deep listening and compassion can it be transformed and removed. “We need a collective awakening to stop this course of self-destruction.”

Immediately following the instruction on reaching reconciliation, Jesus teaches the power of prayer in common: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.” We are never alone. “I am with you.” The Spirit of the living God is ours. God is a God of life and calls us always to life. God is our sustainer, our hope, even when there seems to be no hope, no way out. When we turn to our deepest center, where the living God dwells, where we are all connected, where hearts are changed, hope springs forth. This is our belief. We seek God’s wisdom and we have the word of Jesus, wisdom incarnate, that God is with us.

Paul preaches to the Romans the word that sums up the whole law and the prophets. Paul quotes the Mosaic Law and Jesus: “You must love your neighbor as yourself.” Paul adds, “Love is the one thing that cannot hurt your neighbor; that is why it is the answer to every one of the commandments.” (Jerusalem Bible Translation) Jesus repeated this command many times and in many ways. Finally, on the night before he died, we hear again, “The command I give you is this, that you love one another.”

A central teaching in most spiritual traditions is: What you wish to experience, provide for another (Dalai Lama).

And who is my neighbor? Must I really look beyond the confines of my church, my faith, my culture, my nation and see the “other” as neighbor, sister, brother? Must I really confront my own prejudices, stereotypes, and tendencies toward violence in word or action?

“Is another world possible?” Can the community of nations come together to forge reconciliation, restoration, and mutual respect, generate concern for the “little ones”? Can the growing gap between rich and poor be reduced so that all may have access to the basics necessary for a human life? How much depends on me?

Rutilio Grande, Jesuit martyr of El Salvador, left us these words: “The material world is for everyone, without borders. God’s table is a common table, big enough for everyone, each one with a seat, so that each one comes to the table to eat.” Rutilio not only spoke these words but he was willing to die for his belief.

Is this only a utopian dream? Perhaps fasting and prayer and the focus this action brings can lead us to ask deeper questions together: What do I/we need to fast from in order for more and more people to take their rightful seat at the table? What is it I/we really hunger for?

The Eucharistic Prayer II for Masses of Reconciliation reads in part:

Your Spirit changes our hearts:
enemies begin to speak to one another,
those who were estranged join hands in friendship,
and nations seek the way of peace together.

Your Spirit is at work
when understanding puts an end to strife,
when hatred is quenched by mercy,
and vengeance gives way to forgiveness.

----- Quoted on A Poster for Peace in Memory of September 11, 2001, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago 1-800-933-1800

PRAYER SERVICES FOR SEPTEMBER 11TH.

There are prayer services to commemorate the tragedy at:

<http://smp.org/tragedy/Issues.cfm>

ONE GOOD PUBLICATION FOR THE PREACHER

NEW WINE. Armando P. Ibanez, OP, the editor, describes this new publication as “a journal dedicated to the exposure, promotion and advancement of Dominicans in mass media---print, radio, film and television.” Published by Pluma Productions, P.O. 1138. Hollywood, CA 90078-1138 (333-463-1138) Website: www.plumanproductions.com

QUOTABLE

The first chapter of Genesis describes a God who initiates the creative process of speaking such powerful words as “Let there be light!” Creation, in turn, attentively listens to God’s word and responds appropriately: “And there was light.” The fundamental relationship between God and creation is one of communication: God initiates the dialogue, and creation is to listen and respond. When any part of creation does not listen attentively or does not respond appropriately to God’s word, it is no longer in a right relationship with God or with itself. It is our very nature to listen to the word of God and to respond. While communication is at the very heart of creation’s relationship with the Creator, communication is also essential in the human family if we are to live with one another as brothers and sisters, children of the one God. Defective communication leads to alienation. It drives us apart from one another and increases the experience of human suffering. However, loving communication is one of the most important means of reconciliation, of coming back together. Learning to listen carefully to one another as, together, we listen attentively to God, can bring us closer to one another, fulfilling the vision of the Scriptures and God’s deepest intentions for the human family---that we learn to live in peace, harmony and unity with one another and with God.

---Carlo Maria Martini quoted in, NEW WINE: DOMINICANS IN MASS MEDIA, page 35.

JUSTICE NOTES

(These weekly quotes may be helpful in your preaching or may also be added to

your weekly parish bulletin as a way of informing your faith community on some social issues.)

Problems such as racism, hunger, and inequality seem so big that it's easy to feel small and powerless. How much of a difference can you actually make anyway? In truth, you can make one person's difference---no more, no less. On a daily basis, you not only have the power to perpetuate the world's problems, you have the opportunity to stand up for the creation of a world based on your own deeply held values.

- Your money invested in the right bank could help create more wealth for poor communities.
- Your letter can be the one that changes the behavior of an entire corporation.
- Your vote can elect government officials that really make a difference.
- Your timely call to a friend can change their outlook for the day.
- Your donation can help a social change organization meet its lofty goals.
- Your purchase can allow a locally owned business to thrive in your community.
- Your participation can transform a small group of people into the beginnings of a social movement.

-----Ellis Jones, Ross Haenfler and Brett Johnson with Brian Klocke, **THE BETTER WORLD HANDBOOK: FROM GOOD INTENTIONS TO EVERY DAY ACTIONS** NEW SOCIETY, quoted in "Spirituality and Health," Summer 2002, page 76.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: **"FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR A."** The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat Reader) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer. To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the "Year A-CD" button on the right and follow the instructions.
2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (Judeop@Juno.com)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/>
(Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes "First Impressions" and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)
4. “Homilias Dominicales”-- these Spanish reflections are written by three friars of the Southern Dominican Province, Jose David Padilla, OP, Wilmo Candanedo, OP and two Dominican sisters, Regina Mc Carthy, OP and Doris Regan, OP. Like “First Impressions”, “Homilias Dominicales” are a preacher’s early reflections on the upcoming Sunday readings and liturgy. So, if you or a friend would like to receive “Homilias Dominicales” drop a note to John Boll, O.P. at: Jboll@opsouth.org or jboll@preacherexchange.org
5. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, send a note to John Boll at the above Email address.

DONATIONS

If you would like to support this ministry, please send tax deductible contributions to Jude Siciliano, O.P., whose address is listed below. Make checks to: Dominican Friars of Raleigh. Or, go to our webpage to make an online donation: <http://www.preacherexchange.com>
Thank you.

Blessings on your preaching,

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