

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS”      24<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY (A)  
Sirach 27: 30-28:7   Romans 14: 7-9   Matthew 18: 21-35  
By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

[PRENOTES: We begin a new offering in this edition of “First Impressions” --- POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES. See below for details.

AND....

The reflections for four weeks in September are being written by one of the Dominican participants in the “FAST FOR PEACE AND NONVIOLENCE” at Union Square in New York City. This is the third week of the fast and our reflections today are by Brian Pierce, OP, of our Raleigh, N.C. community of preachers. If you want more information on the fast:

[www.dominicanfastforpeace.org](http://www.dominicanfastforpeace.org).

FORGIVENESS AND NONVIOLENCE

To forgive is an act of nonviolence. In forgiving, we choose to break the cycle of violence; we refuse to seek revenge for a wrong done. It is not easy. None of us has been perfect in the art of forgiving, but hopefully we have all experienced the freedom that comes with letting go of our hatred. Forgiveness sets us free.

There is a scene in the movie “The Mission” when Robert De Niro, who plays the part of a 16th century Portuguese conquistador, begins a long penitential journey to seek forgiveness of the sin of his participating in the oppression of the GuaraNi Indians of South America. As a sign of his repentance he drags his armor and sword miles and miles through the rain forest, scaling the magnificent Iguazu Falls -- a kind of Christ figure carrying his cross. He finally reaches the end of his journey, the armor of his former way of life hanging from a rope around him. Exhausted, he looks into the faces of the Indians whom he has persecuted and oppressed, searching in their eyes for some sign of forgiveness. Suddenly one of the Indians stands, pulls out his knife, and approaches this man who has conquered and killed his people. He approaches DeNiro with the knife, and then, in a truly noble gesture, he cuts the rope -- sending the heavy armor plunging into the precipice below. The Indian forfeits his right to take revenge, and instead chooses to set his oppressor free. Oppressed and oppressor are both free. The cycle of violence has been broken.

To forgive one who has inflicted harm upon us is not an act of cowardice. In fact, it is precisely the opposite. It is an act of tremendous courage. God, who always forgives, is anything but a coward. A person who has suffered oppression certainly has a “right” to seek revenge, but at the same time that person can choose to seek a justice based on nonviolence and reconciliation.

Throughout our lives, we all have to make the choice between revenge and forgiveness, between violence and nonviolence. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of humankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction.” And in the words of our reading from the Book of Sirach, “Forgive your neighbor’s injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven” (28:2). The one forgiven and the one who forgives are both set free.

This ancient teaching is a centerpiece of the teaching of Jesus: “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you.” (Lk 6:27). And when Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,” he does more than just reach them words. He gives them the example of his own life. Scourged, hated, crucified, Jesus speaks in his final words, “Abba, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Today’s gospel parable is about forgiveness. It is about the kind of forgiveness that must necessarily pass from one person to the next. The servant in the gospel was forgiven his great debt, and yet somehow failed to look with the same mercy and compassion on his fellow servant. If a person is forgiven and then does not pass on the gift to another, the gift dies, and in a very real way, that person’s heart dies, too. St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers, once said, “The seed hoarded dies, while the seed sown bears much fruit.” When forgiveness is hoarded, it dies. When it is shared with others it bears much fruit.”

We have just remembered the first anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The people of the United States and around the world still grieve the violence that was inflicted on that day. Many beautiful, innocent people died, and our grief is an expression of our love. We are aware, too, that many innocent people have died violently since September 11th -- people in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Palestine, Israel and Colombia -- people loved and missed by their

families and friends. The death of a human being is never simply “collateral damage.”

We are all faced with a choice, a choice of conscience. Do we now become the aggressor or the peacemaker? Do we, as a nation, seek revenge or reconciliation? Do we now attack and kill the enemy, or do we attempt to forgive and make peace? Do we simply become the violence which we abhor or do we choose to sow seeds of peace?

Vengeance and violence are the way of cowards. Forgiveness, on the other hand takes courage. Forgiveness can heal our wounded world. To forgive is an act of nonviolence. What would our world look like if in Jerusalem and Washington, in Kashmir and Bogota, in New York and Kabul people truly opened their arms and hearts in reconciling love? Peace just might show its lovely face. A new day might dawn. And September might just become the month when swords were beat into plough shares, and peace was born in our world. The choice is ours.

-- Written in New York during the Fast for Peace and Nonviolence.

### POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I will post in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or several of them to let them know that we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to:

Gary D. Hines D 91000 (on the Row for 18 years, getting close to an execution)

David Fierro C49660 (14 years on the Row)

both are at: San Quentin Prison Tamal, California 94964

Henry Lee Hunt 0197656 (15 years on the Row)

Errol Duke Moses

John Lee Conaway 0084604 (recently arrived on the Row, hasn't seen family in

10 years)

All three are at: Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

#### **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](mailto:Jboll@opsouth.org) or [jboll@preacherexchange.org](mailto: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,

Jude Siciliano, O.P., Promoter of Preaching, Southern Dominican Province, USA

P.O. Box 12927, Raleigh, N.C. 27605, (919) 833-1893, Email: [judeop@juno.com](mailto:judeop@juno.com)