

***FIRST IMPRESSIONS***    7<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER (B)  
Acts 1: 15-17, 20a, 20c-26   Psalm 47   1 John 4: 11-16   John 17: 11b-19

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

About 20 years ago I had a friend who was dying of cancer. When I could, I tried to visit and bring him some of the food treats he was still able to swallow. I never knew when our last visit would be. He died while I was away. Though I knew he was dying, at our last visit he still seemed strong; I thought I would see him again. (I am reminded of a line from James Taylor's song, "Fire and Rain," about the loss of a friend. "But I always thought I'd see you again.") If I had known that our visit was our last, I would have said some more important things to him than "wasting" time talking about the past Sunday's football scores.

Farewell conversations are something precious; a time to express love, gratitude and future concerns. After my friend died I received a card from him! He knew the end was near and he wrote what was on his mind and in his heart about our friendship and our mutual friends. He had a friend mail the card after he died. How very thoughtful he was, right up to the end! I treasured that "last will and testament" and would occasionally re-read it in remembrance of a special friend.

Today's gospel is from Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" at the Last Supper. While he isn't dying from a disease, he does know that the end is near. Later in the meal he will tell his disciples, "...I call you friends since I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father" (15:15). So, Jesus is speaking to his "friends" about important things that are on his mind and in his heart. His disciples will treasure his words and also pass them on to us so that, when we hear them, we will remember and be strengthened as we try to live his life in "the world."

I count nine references in today's short reading to "the world." Now in John's gospel "the world" refers to those people and forces opposed to God. It does not refer to the world that was created through the Word (1:3); the world that was created and is sustained in God's love is sacred. But still, there is "the world" that rejects God and is about to put Jesus to death. He is leaving his followers behind, and they will have to contend with and be rejected by that world as he was.

The world's opposition to Jesus' followers won't always be outright hostile. In

fact, that world of power, status, materialism and sparkle will be alluring to Christians, seduce us and draw us in. Jesus also knows if we do resist the ways of the world, we will experience alienation and opposition. We will feel like strangers, people who don't fit in – even in our own families! So, Jesus prays to his Father for those he is leaving behind. He knows and will soon have firsthand experience, how the world is set over and against him and all he values.

When I was younger the anti-God forces in the world seemed to be more easily identified – they were the Communists. We simplistically thought we could point to “the world” that opposed Christ; it was those atheists, the communists! We could pinpoint the well-defined object of our fears. But, in fact, it wasn't that simple then and it isn't simple now. “The world,” as John's gospel describes it, is much closer to us; we are immersed in it and its values affect us and our children every day in commonplace ways. For example, parents are very careful what they allow their children to watch on television. A father complained recently that offensive violence and explicit sexual material used to be at later hours when his children were asleep. “Now,” he said, “Prime time television is a trap, exposing my kids to values I find objectionable.”

But it is not only our children who are affected by the world's stealthful influence and entrance into our lives, is it? Ours is a narcissistic age in which we are encouraged to place ourselves first; our comfort, security, looks, possessions, etc. Do we, in fact, embrace the world's values? Are we suckered into buying into the world's priorities? We must ask ourselves each day whether we are living the life Jesus has shown us. We can't be split personalities; belong to the world and, at the same time, live out our Christian commitment. There is a danger we are trying to live two lives simultaneously: follow one set of values for six days and then, on the seventh, profess faith in another way of living.

Jesus' prayer at table with his disciples is the same prayer he offers at table with us today; that we might live in the world but not surrender to it. He wants us to be “consecrated to the truth”: to live and give witness in the world of Christ's way, the way of truth. His prayer is that we live in his truth and be protected from the world. But he doesn't want his disciples to live barricaded off from the world. Quite the contrary, he sends them out into the world, just as his Father has sent him.

Wouldn't it be terrible if Jesus just up and left us? How could we, his disciples,

live in the same world that rejected and killed him? What chance would we have? How would we fare on our own, when our deepest values or even our lives were threatened? On our own, we couldn't, but Jesus isn't praying for himself as he prepares to leave – he is praying for us.

Jesus' obedience to God's will is going to bring on his death. He "consecrates" ("sanctifies") himself to fulfilling God's mission he was sent by the Father to accomplish. Jesus is giving himself up for the sake of his disciples and as he showed them earlier in the meal (13:1ff.), when he washed their feet, now they too are going to be consecrated to living the truth – the life of humble service he lived and died for.

Gathered at Eucharist Jesus is offering his prayer again for us and he is offering us, with himself, to his Father. Once again he is consecrating us in his life. Jesus has and shares an intimate life with the Father and now he is sharing that life with us. What a blessing this community is! Together we are consecrated into the divine life and also committed to one another by our union in Christ. We are to be courage, support and example to one another as we live our vocations in the world. We are able to do that because Jesus' prayer for us is heard – we are consecrated in truth.

Next week we will celebrate Pentecost and hear another reading from John's gospel (15: 26-27; 16: 12-15). We will celebrate that Jesus has sent us "the Spirit of truth" – lest we think we have to work out things on our own. That Spirit, Jesus tells us, will "guide you to all truth." As it turns out, Jesus has not left us alone in the world, if he had, it would defeat us. He prays for us to his Father; he gathers us in community so we can hear again his encouraging farewell words and, as he promised, he sends us the Holy Spirit, who consecrates us and enables us to live the truth of Jesus' life in the world.

### QUOTABLE

The ultimate perfection of the contemplative life is not a heaven of separate individuals, each one viewing his own private vision of God: it is a sea of Love which flows through the One Body and Soul of all the elect, all the angels and saints, and their contemplation would be incomplete if it were not shared, or if it were shared with fewer souls, or with spirits capable of less vision and less joy. And I will have more joy in heaven and in the contemplation of God, if you are

also there to share it with me; and the more of us there will be to share it the greater will be the joy of all. For contemplation is not perfect unless it is shared. We do not finally taste the full exultation of God's glory until we share His infinite gift of it by overflowing and transmitting glory all over heaven, and seeing God in all the others, and knowing that He is the Life of all of us and that we are all One in Him.

----Thomas Merton. (Submitted by Stephen Gambino, a member of the Dominican Laity)

### **FAITH BOOK**

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.*

#### **From today's Gospel reading:**

Jesus prayed to his Father:  
"As you sent me into the world,  
so I sent them into the world."

#### **Reflection:**

In John's gospel "the world" refers to those people and forces opposed to God. It is the "world" that rejects God and is about to put Jesus to death. He is leaving his followers behind, and they will have to contend with and be rejected by that world – as he was. Jesus' prayer at table with his disciples is the same prayer he offers at the eucharistic table with us today: that we might live in the "world," but not surrender to it.

#### **So, we ask ourselves:**

- How do I experience in my daily life "the world" that tests my beliefs in Jesus' ways?
- Where do I get the strength that keeps me from giving into the ways of that world?

## JUSTICE NOTES

*Walter Burghardt, SJ, renowned preacher, theologian (editor in chief for 44 years of "Theological Studies") and founder and co-director of the Woodstock Theological Center's program "Preaching the Just Word," once listed the following "eight areas of serious injustice in our country.*

And a stirring call to action. God's word in Scripture---from Psalm 72, Micah 6:8, and Isaiah 58:6 7 to Jesus, "the Just One"-impelled me to lecture, preach and write in eight areas of serious injustice.

(1) In the richest country on earth, 12.6 million households, with approximately 13 million children, experience hunger with increasing incidence of malnutrition.

(2) In the United States the elderly face uncertainty that was unheard of half a century ago. Pension benefits, including health insurance, are being yanked away with no warning )even more shocking, these assaults are inflicted with the blessing of the government.

(3) Here, where the Statue of Liberty still proclaims a warm welcome to immigrants, far too many persons whose parents or grandparents came to this country as recently as the last century are eager to close the borders and take care only of "our own,"

(4) Our criminal justice system is not fair, impartial or balanced, in part because its focus •

continues to be on punishment, rarely on rehabilitation.

(5) It is clear that innocent people in the United States have been executed; the only question is how many. By contrast, the European Union bans from its membership any country that still practices capital punishment.

(6) By not adequately responding to the ecological realities of the link between global warming and devastating hurricanes, as well as the alarming cause and effect of deforestation and mudslides, water pollution and poisoned fish, smog and life-threatening lung illnesses, we are not only killing our planet, we are also killing ourselves.

(7) The traditional Catholic conditions for declaring a war just-defensive necessity, the last resort, approval of a large number of nations, endorsement of the United Nations, high probability of success-were not met by the Bush administration in the 2003 pre-emptive attack on Iraq.

(8) A blot on our national conscience and international standing is the shocking number of homeless veterans (the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

estimates 500,000 veterans experience homelessness in a given year). Despite various pieces of legislation aimed at meeting special needs of homeless veterans, many will be ignored and left to fend for themselves on the very streets they fought to keep safe.

## POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, *"People of Faith Against the Death Penalty"* If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Keith B. East #0511998 (On death row since 11/8/95)
- John D. Mc Neil #0275678 (11/10/95)
- Stacey A. Tyler #0414853 (11/14/95)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

"Blessings on your preaching"

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