

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 25<sup>TH</sup>. SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)

Wisdom 2: 12, 17-20 Psalm 54 James 3: 16-4:3 Mark 9: 30-37

By: *Jude Siciliano, OP*

Dear Preachers:

I came across a "Peoples' Magazine" recently. It was a few years old, and the cover story was titled, "Fifty of the World's Most Beautiful People." Well, that grabbed my attention, and I gave a look. I couldn't help but notice that "the most beautiful" were almost all young or, at the most, people in their 50's who were very well "preserved." They were mostly movie and tv stars; wealthy and almost all white. There were some young business people who had made hundreds of millions in the high-tech fields—as I said, this was an old magazine. The editors put these fifty in the magazine, not because they had any personal preferences for these chosen ones; but because the editors knew what would sell magazines. They knew that these fifty people represent a common notion of what many in our culture consider--- "Beautiful."

What if Jesus had a chance to publish a magazine cover story of the most beautiful people? First of all, there would be more than 50 ---his preferences throughout his life show that. In today's story he points to a child to show his disciples who the really important are—the "beautiful people"--- and whom the disciples are to imitate. The disciples are no different from us. In Mark's gospel they tend to miss the point of Jesus' teachings. It is clear that like our modern world, they gauge their lives in terms of certain norms for success. Success is on their minds; they see a bright future in following Jesus. (Cf. 10: 35 ff. James and John's hopes for their own future with Jesus. )

Jesus teaches and reminds us today that the "beautiful people" are often indistinguishable in our society, for they seem so "ordinary." They live lives of faith and daily generosity. These are the ones of uncommon generosity, making sacrifices large and small for others--- all the time--- and frequently without publicity. Their daily choices show that these "little ones," are the ones Jesus has in mind; in his book they are "the most beautiful people." You could miss them for they are not the glamorous or those with "sex appeal". They do not dress in Oscar de la Renta. People like Harry who has lived on the streets for 5 years and gets a sandwich and change each day, but shares them with his crippled friend Dan, who can't get to where the food and change are. There is John, a single parent making

personal sacrifices for his two children. The "most beautiful" include working parents who make innumerable daily sacrifices and have to combine their income to support their families and pay for their children's education. There's Mary, who gave up her overtime, even though she and her husband could use the extra money. She wanted to be home with him and the children.

The list of the "most beautiful" goes on and includes people of a certain "status"-- managers and executives, doctors, nurses, lawyers and teachers. These are people who don't claim their own position as entitlement to special treatment; but who boast with pride in the achievement of their fellow workers and their students. These are the "little ones" who embrace the way of living Jesus lived and so he, in return, embraces them. When we see Jesus in them and acknowledge their way as the way we too want to live, we are "receiving" Jesus and, as he says, "whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

When I look around to see the people Jesus describes as "the greatest" I think of a woman in Richmond, Ca. who has a real estate business. Even though the market was white hot, she wanted to give an hour or two to teach inner city kids. She took that step and in helping them, heard their stories and decided to raise \$15,000 to send 20 to camp. But they had no sleeping bags and camp clothes, so she raised \$30,000. This got time consuming, and she missed out on some important real estate deals, but says, "My babies were worth it!" There was one eight-year-old girl who didn't want to go back home because she said at night in her neighborhood she could hear gunshots--- but at camp at night all she could hear were the crickets. That real estate agent never regretted the loss of extra income so that child could hear crickets.

If Jesus were the editor of a magazine he might call it "The New People Magazine." The above-mentioned are the kind of people we would see pictures of, and we would read their stories. In the world's eyes they are not very important; but their lives show the life of Jesus in our midst. They show that "three days after" Jesus' death, he really did rise—just as he said he would. How do we know? The sacrificial lives of many of his servants are proof-positive. Like him, they too are feeding the hungry, healing the sick and raising the dead to new life.

It's hard to see clearly in our world. Hard to discern what is of mere human fabrication and what is of Jesus. We need corrective lens to see what has true value---and to be embraced; and what is false--- and to be put aside. Today's

gospel helps give us that vision. It clears our eyes and opens our minds again to another way to see and live in this world.

### ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER

John Markey in, *Creating Community: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church*, Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.

This is a fine review of ecclesiology prior to Vatican II and then, as a result of the Council's two major ecclesial documents (*Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*). A good introduction or updating in ecclesiology for any preacher and parish study group.

### QUOTABLE

Americans are fascinated with the idea of community, and the term serves as a very significant "buzzword" in American culture. Research conducted in the last decades of the twentieth century showed that community represented the single most urgent longing of Americans, and also, importantly, the one goal that seemed most elusive and difficult to attain. On the one hand, they yearn to be socially connected and united at a very fundamental level in their lives. On the other hand, Americans embrace a type of radical individualism that seems to negate the possibility of achieving the genuine social bonds that they desire. In many ways this ongoing dialectic between individual and community has defined the cultural development of American society.

John Markey in, *Creating Community: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church*, page 177.

### JUSTICE NOTES

Encuentro and Mission: A Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry

#### Pastoral Priorities in Hispanic Ministry

-----Hispanic ministry has empowered millions of Hispanic Catholics to become active participants in the life of the Church and society. This success has been made possible due to a consultative process by which challenges have been identified and priorities established.

----- Ministry in the twenty-first century requires a commitment to welcome and to foster the cultural identity of the many faces of the Church while building a profoundly Catholic and culturally diverse identity through an ongoing process of inculturation. The following basic pastoral responses are based on principles that have proven very useful in developing Hispanic ministry over the last thirty years

of a national pastoral effort. We bishops are confident that they will continue to help the Church respond to the Hispanic presence.

#### Articulate a Clear Vision of Ministry Based on Unity in Diversity

As full members of the Body of Christ, Hispanic Catholics have an understanding of their role in the mission of the Church that serves to empower the ministerial leadership to be aware of the Church's culturally diverse dimension and to work toward building the one body of Christ while honoring cultural differences. This principle of unity and diversity involves a commitment that affirms and fosters cultural identity for all groups while promoting the transformation of cultures by gospel values.

Unity in diversity stems from the spiritual discipline of inclusion rooted in the Gospel. Inclusion calls all Christians to open themselves up in such a way that they risk being changed by whoever is the stranger, the foreigner, in our lives.

Through inclusion, the newcomer tries to participate fully in U.S. life by loving it and learning the language and the laws; but the native culture is also maintained, along with the native tongue and values.

This process of gospel inclusion adds to the U.S. culture the specific richness of other cultures while guiding all Catholics beyond a shared tolerance of one another towards greater acceptance and respect.

—submitted by, fr. Angel M Del Rio Rubio O.P.  
Dominican Community of Austin, TX

## POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more 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:.....

- Terrence Taylor #0539901 (On death row since 2/18/97)
- Johnny S. Parker #0311966 (3/24/97)
- John H. Fleming #0571536 (4/8/97)
- Rowland Hedgepath #017601 (7/3/97)

----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

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Thank you.

"Blessings on your preaching",

Jude Siciliano, OP

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