

**“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 14<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY -C-**

Isaiah 66: 10-14 Psalm 66 Galatians 6: 14-18 Luke 10: 1-12, 17-20

*By: Jude Siciliano, OP*

Dear Preachers:

There has been a lot of discussion and writings in recent years about stages of life and the characteristics of each stage. In general, we move through different stages through our lives. Each stage is characterized by certain common experiences: each new stage requires leaving a former one behind, with its comforts and familiar territory; entering a period of "in-betweenness" where nothing seems to be happening except a sense of loss and disorientation. Then finally, we enter a new stage and experience new life there. The new life comes out of the dying experiences that precede it and couldn't have been imagined while we were going through the dying and waiting periods. We all go through these transitions; some are major and signal big changes; some are minimal and happen daily. I think there can be a link between the Gospel, and the various stages disciples find themselves.

Some allusions might also be made to the promises of the first reading and its rich imagery of consolation and fulfillment. We might proceed as follows.

The journey motif is strong in this section of Luke from which today's Gospel is taken. Jesus is going to Jerusalem to become its source of consolation. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that shows God's strong desire to comfort the afflicted people and to be their powerful God. On his journey, Jesus will show signs that reveal his power over sin and death. We could preach on this traveling theme, this sense of "passing through." We might show that our lives are a series of transitions, having Jesus with us at each passing-through stage. Each stage has its own challenges to discipleship.

List in your preaching some of the transitions we make from childhood to adolescence, to adulthood, to marriage, to sickness, to career shifts, to aging, to widowhood, etc. For example: when we are beginning our careers what are the principles that guide our choices? Are money and style of life the basic determinants? Would we consider taking a job that might pay less, but be of service to others? Another example: when we get old and find our lives less active, do we feel less worthy? Less significant? Have we judged our lives by how much we have produced and achieved? Do we now see our lives based on fidelity to Christ and his fidelity to us?

Each stage on our journey to Jerusalem requires a confidence that Jesus is present to us,

encouraging, comforting, consoling, challenging and guiding us. (We journey as a faith community as well and many faith communities find themselves going through significant changes.) The first reading's promises of fruitfulness and rejoicing encourage us, for we believe God accompanies us and fructifies each stage. So, as Isaiah says to us today, each stage will make, "the Lord's power known to God's servants."

But the Gospel also suggests that even as we pass through personal shifts and ventures into unfamiliar territory, we are still disciples that are continually being sent to proclaim the Lord's coming. Each period then has its own opportunities to be "sent-messengers." We can witness along the way, no matter how rough the way, because we have a keen sense of being "sent" and therefore an accompanying sense of the Lord's presence with us. The turmoil that transition and change of life can bring are offset by the peace of the believing disciple; maybe that is why the disciple brings peace to each "house" or place visited. Others get the message of trust and peace and they themselves are strengthened and encouraged; they hear the Good News through the disciples' own experience and confidence. "Peace be to this house," is enfleshed in the presence of the disciple sent by the Lord.

I like the image of our name being inscribed in heaven. If that were so, then there is a certain confidence we can have among the doubting and groupings of this life. It suggests that our relationship with God, because of Christ, is secure and this enables a sense of freedom, spontaneity and even risk among the believers. What will we lose if our names are inscribed in heaven? On what other less tangible assurance are we placing our trust? And how much more secure we are, knowing that our names are inscribed in a place that awaits us as our true home!

## **ONE GOOD BOOK FOR THE PREACHER**

Thomas Long. "Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible". Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989

Here is how this leading homiletician describes his book. "This book is about biblical preaching, and it is based upon the relatively simple idea that the literary form and dynamics of a biblical text can and should be important factors in the preacher's navigation of the distance between text and sermon" (page 7). Writing in his usual clear style, Long shows how to take the literary characteristics of the texts and use them in the preaching preparation process. He applies his method to such biblical literary forms as narratives, epistles, parables, psalms and proverbs.

## **QUOTABLE**

While it is true that the biblical text assumes a dominant role in the process of interpretation, meaning erupts in the interaction between text and interpreter. The text controls the process of reading, but what the reader brings to that encounter imposes limits upon and creates possibilities for that process. Because the text exerts control, there are boundaries beyond which interpretation may not go and still claim textual validity. But because each time a text is read the circumstances of reading are different, new meanings are always emerging. Preaching does not involve determining what the text used to mean and then devising some creative way to make that meaning pertinent to the contemporary scene. Preaching involves a contemporary interpreter closely attending to a text, discerning the claim that text makes upon the current life of the community of faith, and announcing that discovery in the sermon.

—Thomas Long, (page 34).

## **JUSTICE NOTES**

(This is an announcement from the Akron Dominican Sisters)

In accord with our Assembly (Chapter) 2000,... the Akron Dominican Sisters after prayerful reflection and study of the issue voted to take a corporate stance against capital punishment....The results were announced on June 15, 2001. A short version of the Statement follows.

"We, the Sisters of St. Dominic of Akron, Ohio, affirming our belief in the sacredness of all human life, profess our opposition to the death penalty as a cruel and inhuman method of punishment. It is our belief that in taking the life of another through capital punishment, the cycle of violence is not reversed but rather accelerated.

We further reject capital punishment because there is ample evidence that it is applied in a racist manner; that death sentences disproportionately affect the poor; that it is not a deterrent to crime; and that appeals by prisoners have been drastically restricted, increasing the risk of execution of the innocent.

As people of faith, we accept the call to extend the compassion of Jesus to victims and their families supporting them through their pain and grief. etc. etc. "