

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, August 18, 2019

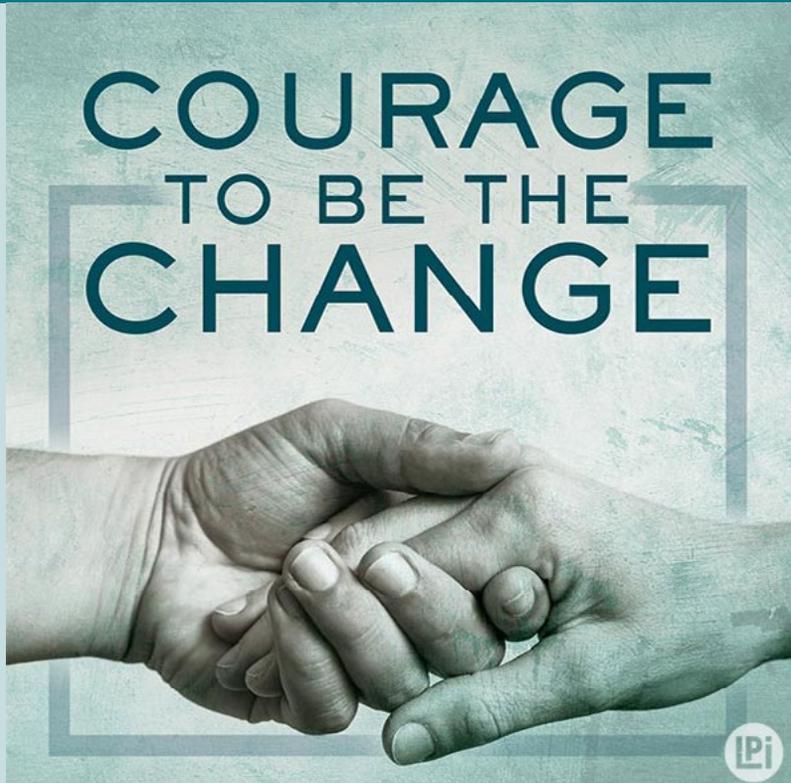
Live the Faith You Profess

Written by Br. Silas Henderson, SDS

Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10

Hebrews 12:1-4

Luke 12:49-53



We have all been taught, and rightly so, that God is love. We see Jesus as a gentle shepherd, a kind and selfless teacher, who makes space for children, even as he reaches out to the sick and poor. And these images and themes are certainly major elements of Luke's Gospel, which we are hearing in this liturgical year. However, the passage proclaimed on the 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time presents a different — perhaps even startling — facet of Jesus' teachings. The Prince of Peace asks, "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on earth?" Of course, because that's what we've been taught to expect. That is our hope.

In a sense, the passages from Luke's Gospel that we are hearing in these weeks could be folded into the great Wisdom tradition of the Old Testament. We are no longer hearing stories of Jesus' signs and wonders, those moments of revelation that helped those first followers to understand who he is. Rather, now, we are being invited to reflect on how we are to follow this Master Teacher in whom we have come to believe. These Gospel passages invite us to reflect on prayer, works of charity and justice, and the attitudes that should be the hallmark of the followers of Jesus.

Like the earlier Wisdom teachings, these readings are leading us to consider the demands and consequences of an enacted faith. Because at the end of the day, our call to discipleship requires more than simply learning the stories of Jesus and being able to parrot back his teachings. Rather, Divine Wisdom calls us to live what we profess, guided by our faith convictions.

With this Wisdom perspective in mind, we recognize that what Jesus is asking us to reflect on is the prophetic stance that is part of discipleship. However, as we see in the story of Jeremiah proclaimed in the first reading this Sunday, that prophetic stance can put us at odds with those who are opposed to the truth. This was certainly true for Jesus as well.

In a commentary on this Sunday's Gospel, Sister Barbara Reid, O.P., wrote,

"Jesus speaks of the same kind of divided reaction that his ministry provokes. As he ignites in his followers a vision of justice, peace, and well-being for all that could blaze forth, some readily welcome it. Others resist mightily. The resisters are not eager for the burning away of their comforts and privileges as Jesus' way of transformation demands ... It is easy to resist the version of a prophet that insists on transformative change. Better to get rid of such an unwelcome messenger and continue on undisturbed. (from "Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections for Year C")

And it is here that we discover the two-fold challenge of this Sunday's Gospel.

First, do we ignore or try to silence those prophets who are calling for change — change within ourselves, our communities, or even in the Church? Are we willing to risk dialogue and even conversion as we are invited to reflect not only on what is possible, but on what might be essential? This can become especially difficult for us when we are being asked to reconsider beliefs, customs, or practices that are near and dear to us. However, discipleship demands that we do not become complacent or settle for the status quo, particularly when we consider the Gospel's call for justice and the upbuilding of the reign of God.

PRAYER

O Lord,
give us a mind that is humble, quiet,
peaceable, patient and charitable,
and a taste of your Holy Spirit
in all our thoughts, words and deeds.
O Lord, give us a lively faith, a firm hope,
a fervent charity, a love of You.

Take from us all lukewarmness
in meditation and all dullness in prayer.
Give us fervor and delight in thinking of You,
your grace, and your tender compassion toward us.
Give us, good Lord,
the grace to work for the things we pray for.
Amen.

— *Prayer of St. Thomas More*

Second, are we willing to live out our call to be prophets ourselves? Where are the injustices or abuses that need to be named? What wrongs need to be made right? What wounds need to be healed? While we are called to pray for peace, we are also called, by virtue of our baptism, to adopt a prophetic stance and call for change — for conversion — where change is needed. This also means that we have to be courageous enough to stand alone at times.

The way toward the peace called for in the Gospel is not an easy one, because injustice does not die easily. As we continue our journey through Ordinary Time, reflecting on the demands of our discipleship and what it means to truly live the faith we profess, we pray for the gifts of courage, discernment, and fortitude to fulfill the mission that has been entrusted to us by Jesus.

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