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Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jun. 25, 2009 The Peace Pulpit

If I tell you that we live in a time of great turmoil and stress, both within the Church and within our world, I?m sure no one will be surprised. It?s certainly very evident within the Church that we are living in very troublesome times. Large numbers of people, in fact, are leaving the Church -- one out of ten people in the United States is a former Catholic; that?s 30 million people. We?ve experienced, just recently it happened again, a terrible scandal of sex abuse.

As we?ve come to know in Ireland, a government investigation commission spent six years investigating and discovered that for decades, there has been terrible abuse and orphanages and boarding schools run by religious orders. A couple weeks ago, Pope Benedict met with the bishops of Ireland and challenged them to change the situation in that country and apologize for what had happened.

Today's Readings
Job 38:1, 8-11
Psalm 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-19, 30-31
2 Corinthians 5:14-17
Mark 4:35-41
Full text of the readings [1]

In the past couple of weeks, a book has just been published by an archbishop from this country, who had to resign his diocese because of scandal. The book is called *A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church*. It makes us aware that we live in very troublesome times when it comes to what is happening within our church. There are disputes over things like the rights of women, equality for women, ordination for women.

The pope himself has urged that we must continue the law of celibacy but then we find *America* magazine, a Jesuit magazine, editorializing, saying no, it would be so good for the Church if we allowed priests to marry, if we began to have more ministers for our Church and would not have to be closing parishes or having parishes constantly live with the threat of being closed.

Of course, in our world, we are very much aware of turmoil going on in Iran right now. We wonder how that?s going to come out and what effect that will have for the other countries in that area, for us, as Iran continues to develop nuclear weapons. We?re aware of the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq. In our own country, the violence continues to increase. We had recently, a murder at an abortion clinic -- someone thinking that it?s right to murder a person because that person is doing abortions. Everywhere we turn, there is turmoil and strife.

It?s one of the reasons why we need to be very grateful to the Sheets family, because they demonstrate their faith today by bringing their new infant daughter to be baptized, to become one of this community of disciples of Jesus, where there is so much turmoil and so much stress. We thank them for their faith and we try to renew and strengthen our own faith as we rejoice with them in this marvelous event in their family?s life.

But I also think it?s important for us to put what is happening in our world now, within the context of our scripture lessons of today. In the gospel lesson specifically, that part of Mark?s gospel was written at a time when there was terrible turmoil in the church and in the world. In the church, there were disputes about whether or not a Christian could eat meat that had been part of a sacrifice to idols or to the Roman emperor. Would that

be sharing in idol worship?

There were disputes over whether people had to become Jews before they could become disciples of Jesus. Paul was baptizing Gentiles without requiring them to adhere to the Jewish law and a terrible dispute broke out in the church. In fact, it got so bad that St. Paul, at one time (and we can read this in the letter to the Galatians) says, ?I stood up and confronted Peter to his face,? and Peter and Paul were in deep disagreement. It would be as though the cardinal archbishop of Venice or Milan stood up and challenged the pope publicly. We?d be aghast at that, but that?s what happened. So this kind of thing was going on in the church from the very beginning.

In the world in which they lived at that point when the gospel of Mark was written, it was a time when there were civil disturbances going on. This was written shortly before the uprising that brought about the destruction of the temple and the dispersal of the Jews from their land. It was a time of violence and difficulty, but here?s why it?s so important to listen to today?s gospel.

This gospel was written right at that point when there was so much stress and so much turmoil and in the world and the community of Mark and his disciples chose to relate the story about Jesus, to show the people, to give them the confidence, show them who?s really in charge in our church and in our world. So we have this marvelous incident of that storm. It?s so easy to picture that on the Sea of Galilee; it?s surrounded by hills, so it was very easy for winds to come through those hills and rile up the water very, very tumultuously.

It was very difficult, so that boat was sinking and the disciples were terrified; Jesus was very calm. When they wake him, what does he do? He stands up and says, ?Be quiet. Be still,? and a great calm comes over it. What is Mark telling us? Mark is reminding us that Jesus is God. When you go back to our first lesson today, you can see the importance of what is revealed to us in this passage from Job.

God is speaking to Job, who has stood up in anger against God, and God says, ?Who shut the sea behind closed doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling clothes; when I set its limits with doors and bars in place, when I said, ?You will not go beyond these bounds; here is where your proud waves must halt??? Now that?s not, obviously, scientifically the way it happened, but it certainly is a very powerful way of demonstrating that God is the Creator; God is the One who brings the seas into being; God is the One who can calm those seas; God is the Maker of all things.

Every creation myth includes this same kind of myth that the Creator is the one who controls all the elements of nature and the earth, who has made them and who is in charge. Jesus is clearly perceived then, as God, the one who can calm the sea, who has the control of all of nature; the one who continues to bring our universe into further and further completion, as we go further out into space. It?s God who is making all of this happen, and Jesus is God.

So those first disciples, the first Christians at the time of Mark, I?m sure, because of Mark in the community writing these things down and sharing them, renewed their conviction about Jesus, strengthened that conviction. And that?s what each of us must do -- remind ourselves that Jesus is God, and that Jesus, as he promised in the gospel two Sundays ago, ?I will be with you all days until the end of time.? Jesus is in our midst right now and Jesus can calm the waves, Jesus can stop the storms, but we have to listen to Jesus, we have to believe in Jesus and follow Jesus.

That?s how we will begin to bring ourselves into a time of peace and renewal within the church, a time of peace and renewal within our world, by accepting and reinforcing our believe Jesus is God and following him. And St. Paul, in the passage from today, the letter to the church at Corinth, reminds us of the same thing -- Jesus, for that same reason, whoever is in Christ is a new creation because, as he has just said, ?Jesus has risen from the dead. For those who are in Christ, the old things have passed away. A new world has come. All of this is the work of God, who in Christ reconciles us to God, but then who entrusted to us,? Paul says, ?the ministry of

reconciliation.?

So as we renew our faith in Jesus and renew our confidence that Jesus can bring calmness and peace into our souls, into our world, into our church, we also accept that we?re part of doing that because we are the ones who share in the very life of Jesus, and he entrusted to us this ministry of reconciliation, so we have to listen to people on all sides. We have to try to reach out, to reconcile, to love, to forgive, in our church and in our world, on individual levels, on a national level within the world.

If we take up this ministry of reconciliation seriously, confident that Jesus is the one who is leading and guiding us, we can be confident that the turmoil in our church will be ended and we can finally also bring peace into our homes, our nation, our world. This morning then, God speaks to us very powerfully about what is important as we live through these stressful times. It?s important for us to have confidence in Jesus and to do our part in fulfilling the ministry Jesus has given to us.

[This homily was preached at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mi.]

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[1] http://www.usccb.org/nab/readings/062109.shtml