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# Transforming our world into the reign of God

Thomas Gumbleton | Jan. 30, 2011 The Peace Pulpit

*The following homily was given by Bishop Gumbleton on January 30, because of the many snow storms it was delayed until posting today.*

I think we understand today?s lessons, can understand them best of all, if we remember the context from which today?s gospel especially is being proclaimed.

Today, as we heard at the beginning, is the fourth Sunday in ordinary time, and the first Sunday of this, what we call ordinary time, we celebrated the baptism of Jesus, and Jesus himself received his call from God to proclaim the good news, but to do it in a special way, through gentleness and love, and in that way to bring justice to all of the nations.

Then after that (although we haven?t had this in a Sunday gospel), Jesus went away for six weeks and began to pray, enter into deep communion with God, what we celebrate during the season of Lent.

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-13

Psalm 146:6-7, 8-9, 9-10

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Matt 5:1-12a

Full text of the readings [1]

But then when he came back, as we heard in last Sunday?s gospel, he discovered John the Baptist, the one who had baptized him, was now imprisoned and was going to be put to death, so Jesus left that place around the River Jordan and traveled north past Nazareth to a place called Capernaum, and that?s when he began now his public life.

As we heard last Sunday, one of the first things that he did was to call other disciples -- James and John, Peter and Andrew -- the first four, and they immediately began to follow him.

When Jesus began his preaching, the first thing that he said, as we heard last Sunday, ?The reign of God is at hand.? The reign of God, the time that we call sometimes the Kingdom of Heaven, the time when God?s way of love will embrace all the people of the earth, when everyone will live a full human life -- the reign of God, God?s life and its fullness shared by all.

Jesus says that?s at hand right now, it?s ready to happen. You don?t have to wait till you die to enter into the reign of God; you enter into the reign of God now because as Jesus says, ?Change your lives.?

That?s how you enter into the reign of God -- we dramatically change our lives. It really has to be a dramatic change, but the word that Jesus uses when he says, ?Change your life,? is a word that means a radical, a total turning around so that you set your life in a whole different direction.

Today?s gospel then gives us the values that Jesus says we must begin to follow and to make our own if we?re going to change our lives and enter into the reign of God. And then also, like Peter and James, Andrew and John, be those who carry this message of Jesus into our world so that we begin to bring about the transformation of our world into the reign of God.

So what are these values that Jesus preaches?

Well, there are eight of them, as you know, what we call the beatitudes.

These are the key, fundamental, profound values that Jesus says anyone who wants to begin to live in the reign of God, first of all, and we won?t be able to cover all of them today. There are too many to really go into it in depth, but we need to pray over these often. But today we?ll just consider a few of them.

The first one is maybe one of the most challenging--blessed are the poor. Luke says just, ?Blessed are the poor,? but Matthew says, ?the poor in spirit,? which helps us to understand a little bit better, what Jesus is saying.

Jesus doesn?t want everyone in the world to be destitute. That isn?t what he means when he says blessed are the poor.

No one is blessed when they don?t have enough to eat every day. That?s not the way God blesses us, but you?re really blessed as a poor person in spirit if you understand where everything we have comes from.

Everything we have is a gift from God--everything. Sometimes we have the sense, ?I earned this. I worked for this. It?s all mine.? No, everything is gift from God, and we have that sense and know that without God we would be nothing, we would have nothing, and so being poor in spirit simply means recognizing that what I have comes from God, and that?s where I put my security then, is in God and not in material things.

Sometimes if we put too much stock in our wealth and our material things, we begin to make that our security. We think that?s what will give us happiness, that will give us fullness of life, but not true.

What gives us security and what Jesus says being blessed, is an awareness that everything we have comes from God and we place all of our security in God and God alone.

It?s hard to come to a point where we really have that deep sense of being poor in spirit, but that?s the first step we must take if we?re going to enter into the reign of God.

Another part of this message today that is very important is, ?Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice?s sake.? Those who hunger--hunger, really have a deep sense of a need for justice--you hunger and thirst for it.

We live in a world where there is such a need for all of us to hunger and thirst and work for justice. A just world would be a world where it really is transformed into the reign of God, where every person would have all that he or she needs for a full human life, and yet that isn?t the situation in our world.

All of us I?m sure this week have been aware of the hundreds of thousands of people that have been demonstrating in Egypt, asking for the overthrow of their government, or the removal at least of their current president, so they can have a just situation. In that country, 40% of the people try to survive on less than $2.00 a day.

It?s a very unjust situation, so the people really have a right to a full human life, but it?s not just far-off places like Egypt; look at our country.

Seventeen million people in this country, the richest country in the world, have to survive in our country on what is less than half of what we call a budget for the poor.

For a family of four, we say the poverty line is $22,000 a year, but 17% of the people in our country live on $11,000 or less for a family of four. You really can?t make it in our country on that amount of money, so we have many poor people in our own midst. Those who hunger and thirst for justice will try to see how we can reverse this, how we can share our wealth. Why should the top 2% of the richest people in our country get huge tax breaks? Yet that?s what they?re getting.

According to Jesus, we would be sharing our wealth. You know, the church has very powerful teachings on justice. Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical in 1967 in which he said something that may shock us, but it?s Catholic teaching.

He said that in the reign of God, everyone would have the right to a full human life and therefore, we have to share what we have. He used the scriptures and then he used Catholic teaching down through the centuries to come to the conclusion, No one has a right to have more than he or she needs when others lack the barest necessities.

That?s a challenging statement.: We don?t have a right to more than we need if others lack the barest necessities. So if we hunger and thirst for justice, it?s going to demand some change in our attitudes and our thinking, and in the way we act.

And maybe the hardest part of this teaching of Jesus today, the values that he says enable us to enter into the reign of God, ?Blessed are those who work for peace.? The way of peace according to Jesus is what is proclaimed in our Eucharistic Prayer, ?Jesus brought us the good news of life to be lived with him forever in heaven, and he showed us the way to that life, the way of love, and he has gone that way before us.?

The way of love eliminates violence, tells us we cannot use violence.

The way of love challenges us to say no to war.

The way of love, the way of Jesus, to make peace, is through reconciliation, forgiveness and love. ?Blessed are the peacemakers, theirs is the reign of God.?

Part of this, I think, is simply being aware that we live in a culture that says the opposite of what Jesus says. We live in a culture that glorifies wealth.

We make a point to announce who are the 400 richest people in our country every year because that?s sort of a goal, become the richest. Well, that?s contrary to Jesus.

Or we think we can solve the world?s problems through war. We?ve been at war in the Middle East since 1991 and the situation is worse than it was. Jesus says no to war, and that?s very hard, but our culture, our attitude seems to be, you need to use violence.

After the killings in Tucson, the next week there was a spurt in gun sales in our country, like, Get more guns and you?re going to solve our problems. That?s not true according to Jesus. These are the kinds of things we have to think about, have to pray about, and how we have to change our lives in order to enter the reign of God right now and make the reign of God happen right now by transforming our world into as close an image of the reign

of God as possible.

Last Sunday Jesus chose Peter and Andrew, James and John to share with him in proclaiming this good news. Today Jesus is offering each of us the opportunity to renew our commitment to be his disciples, to share the good news, transform our world into the reign of God by living according to the gospel message we hear today.

[Bishop Gumbleton gave this homily at St. Ann Catholic Church in Frankfort, Mich.]

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