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# Franz Jägerstätter acted on the Word of God

Thomas Gumbleton | Mar. 10, 2011 The Peace Pulpit

We've been listening to this long discourse that we call the Sermon on the Mount over the past several weeks. It's the most basic teaching of Jesus that brings together all the values that He proclaimed as the way to live according to the Reign of God. The Reign of God is at hand. Change your lives is what He said to us at the beginning of this public teaching, and now He shows us in this long sermon how we make that Reign of God begin to happen.

But of course, as we hear those challenging words, it really is a radical message. Blessed are the poor. The poor, they're the ones closest to God. Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice. Blessed are the peacemakers, those who give up violence, who reject war, work only for peace through peace.

| Ninth Week in Ordinary Time |
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| Deuteronomy 11:18, 26-28, 32 |
| Psalm 31:2-3, 3-4, 17, 25 |
| Romans 3:21-25, 28 |
| Matthew 7:21-27 |
| Full text of the readings |

Radical teachings that Jesus gives to us, and of course, now the question for all of us is: Does He really mean it? Does He really mean it?

"You've heard it said of old, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but I say to you, do not even have anger, hatred or vengeance in your heart against another, to return evil for evil. No, I say to you, you must forgive. Have forgiveness in your heart."

To make it so clear, Jesus said, "Even if you are coming to the altar to offer your gift, and there you remember a brother or sister has something against you: Go first and be reconciled. Only then come back and offer that gift."

Reconciliation: a radical teaching of Jesus.

"You've heard that it was said of old, 'Love your neighbor, hate your enemy,' but I say to you, 'Love your enemy.' "

Does He mean it? Love your enemy? Return good to the one who hurt you?

"You've heard that it was said of old, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' but I tell you do not oppose evil with evil. No, if someone strikes you on the one cheek, turn the other. If someone wants you to go one mile, go two. If someone wants to take your coat, give them your cloak also."

Does he mean it? Offer no violent resistance to evil, resist evil, but through peaceful means?

You have heard that it was said of old, "If you love those who love you, what is special about that? Do not even tax collectors do that?" He wants us to go so much further.

The law of Jesus or the values of Jesus that he proclaims in this long discourse -- does He want us to really follow them? Is it meant to be a pattern for our way of living or is it for some other time when everyone will be

living that way?

You hear people say, "We live in a violent world. How can you not use violence? How can you not be armed? There are people who hate you," but Jesus proclaims this message and today, as we come to the end of the sermon, Jesus is telling us, "Yes, I mean it."

After all this, He says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, become part of the Reign of God, begin to transform our world into the Reign of God."

Not just by saying, "Lord, Lord, Jesus You are Lord," not just recognizing who He is, but those who hear the Word of God and keep it, act on it -- those are the ones who will enter the Reign of God.

Hear that Word of God and act on it.

It goes way back to the proclamation in our first lesson today where Moses is teaching the people how the Word of God is so important.

Engrave these words of Mine on your heart and in your soul. Brand them on your hand as a sign and keep them always before your eyes.

Moses tells those people so long ago, "See, on this day I set before you a blessing and a curse. A blessing if you follow the ways of God that I command you today, a curse if you do not."

It's a choice. That same choice is presented to us today, only Jesus goes beyond those commandments of the old law. "You have heard that it was said of old," and so on. "I say to you?" Jesus is telling us we, too, just like the chosen people when they entered into that first covenant with God, had a choice.

You have a choice. I have a choice.

What will we choose?

Today, of course, we're celebrating a liturgy at St. Radegund, this tiny village in Austria, and in this tiny church, the Church of St. Radegund, we remember someone who heard the Word of God, heard it deeply and kept it.

We honor Franz Jägerstätter, because he did hear that Word of God, in a time when so many others were rejecting God's Word and following the ideology of Naziiism, the ideology that made human kind an idol, especially the most pure, the greatest, the nation that Hitler put before them as the supreme good in their life.

So many somehow, even as we today do not really hear that word of God deeply in our heart, we're ready to follow the ideology of, in our time, consumerism, militarism or racism. These ideologies are so much a part of the culture in which we live.

Franz made a choice and it was a hard choice, of course, but he had prayed deeply the Gospel message of Jesus. He had absorbed it into his very being and so he knew he had to say no to Hitler, no to Hitler's wars, no the ideology of Naziism, and yes to Jesus.

It cost him everything and of course, his widow, his family who were left behind, have continued to live out this same choice, honoring the husband, the father, the one who heard the words of God and followed them.

He took those words in, absorbed them deeply into his spirit and lived according to the Way of Jesus. We have someone like that being held us before as a model, beatified by our Church, declared to be one among the Communion of Saints in Heaven.

We honor him today, but our honor will be empty unless we also seek his intercession to be able to make the choice that he made, to hear this Word of Jesus and to follow it, to give up hatred, to give up vengeance and retaliation, and choose only love and peace. These are of Jesus and are of God.

If we feel it's too much of a challenge, certainly the example of Franz helps us, and I'm sure his intercession helps us also, but we can be reassured, too, by the words of St. Paul today.

It isn't just our own efforts that will make it possible, because as Paul says in writing to the Church of Rome, "Now it has been revealed all together apart from the law as it was already foretold in the law and the prophets. God makes us righteous by means of faith in Jesus Christ, and this is applied to all who believe without distinction of persons."

God gives us the strength, the insight, the ability to hear this Word of God and to keep it.

With confidence then that God is living in our hearts as Paul tells us, and God giving us this strength, we go forth now, trying to continue to listen deeply to God's Word and to follow it.

[Bishop Gumbleton gave this homily at the Village Church of St. Radegund, Austria, hometown of St. Franz Jägerstätter.]

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