NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Go in that way of love

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 21, 2011 The Peace Pulpit

We have begun now, the most solemn week in our liturgical year. It's the week in which we bring to conclusion all that we have been doing during the season of Lent and of course, it ends later in the week with our celebration of Holy Thursday, Good Friday and then the resurrection of Jesus on Easter.
{C}

And so this is the moment when once more we should renew our determination to enter as fully as possible into the spirit of Jesus, to be with him during this week, because at the end of the week on Easter, we'll be renewing our baptismal promises, where we commit ourselves to be changed, be radically changed so that we can be like Jesus, be his disciples, proclaiming his message to the world.

Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-7

Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

Philippians 2:6-11

Matthew 26:14-27:66 or 27:11-54

Full text of the readings [1]

It's very important then, that we do as that first lesson spoke of. A disciple is one who listens deeply, hears God speaking, and then responds.

So we must try today and especially the last three days of the week, to listen deeply to God's word, to understand how radical is the change that God expects of us if we are to be the disciples of Jesus.

And this morning, I will speak about the one probably most radical thing that God asks of us if we are to be disciples of Jesus. That is, we give up violence, that we give up any spirit of retaliation or vengeance, and that we only follow Jesus in his way of active love.

There is a scripture scholar, John McKenzie, who, in a book he calls *The New Testament Without Illusion*, who tells us that if Jesus did not reject violence for any reason whatsoever, we know nothing about Jesus.

In other words, it's so clear in the scriptures that Jesus said no to violence, which would mean no to war, which would mean no to domestic violence, no to violence of any kind, and only follow a way of love. In fact, John McKenzie goes on to say, Jesus taught us how to die, not how to kill.

See, you die, according to the way of Jesus, loving, forgiving your enemies. You die loving and forgiving your enemy. Jesus taught enemy love. He taught us how important it is to always work for reconciliation -- not even have anger in our heart. If we know a brother or sister has something against us, go and be reconciled before you come to offer your gift at the altar -- very hard to do, but it's the way of Jesus.

Some time ago, Pope John Paul II, emphasizing how important is this way of Jesus, nonviolence, said, "I invite all Christians to bring to the common task of proclaiming the gospel, its specific contribution. So in the light of that gospel, I declare, violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Do not believe in violence. Do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe only in peace and forgiveness and love, for they alone are of Christ."

When we hear these words about nonviolence, it becomes very clear, we have to undergo profound change in our hearts and in our ways of living and acting. And today's story of the passion of Jesus and especially the celebration of what we call Palm Sunday, when Jesus was acclaimed, went into Jerusalem in a way that the people were trying to make him king.

They were crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Over a period of time, the enthusiasm had built up around Jesus and they wanted him to be the king and to overthrow the Roman rulers and the occupation and all of its cruelties. They wanted to do this by violence and force, so they thought if they made Jesus their king, they could make it happen.

But if we look very closely at how Jesus decided to come into Jerusalem, we see that he is proclaiming something very different from what they were speaking of.

Matthew enables us to understand this because he gives us a clue on how to interpret what Jesus does when he comes into Jerusalem. He reminds us of what was written down hundreds of years before in the prophet Zechariah.

We might not have noticed the words when that part of the gospel was read, but the prophet Zechariah was speaking about something that happened in his time, when the chosen people were in exile and under persecution, and he promised that a king would come to free them. But here is how that king will come: "Your king is coming, just and victorious, humble, and riding on a donkey." A king doesn't come on a donkey; a king comes on a war horse.

So Matthew puts into his gospel this reference to Zechariah, where Jesus chooses deliberately to ride on a donkey, therefore showing the reality of the words of Zechariah: "No more chariots in Ephraim. No more horses in Jerusalem; this king will do away with them. All weapons will be destroyed. The warrior's bow shall be broken when he brings peace to the nations."

Jesus chooses to come into Jerusalem, not as a king on a war horse, not with weapons, not with armies, but in a very simple and humble way, riding on a donkey, so he was showing the people he was rejecting their call to be the kind of king that would use power and might and violence and killing to try to bring about peace.

Jesus chose the way of non-violence. That's very clear in today's feast of Palm Sunday, and we need to begin to reflect on this and to make sure that in our own hearts, we begin to pray that we can change our attitude that violence is acceptable, that violence is something that will bring peace; it can't.

In the gospel this morning, when someone drew a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, remember what Jesus said? "Put away your sword. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword," it will not bring peace. That's a hard lesson for us. It's very difficult for us to change our attitude and to change our thinking and let that change our actions.

But there's more to this nonviolence of Jesus than simply giving up violence. It's very important that we remember that instead of violence, we choose active love.

So throughout this week as we listen to the scriptures, which I hope we will do very deeply, Jesus will be showing us, time after time, how he reaches out in love, bringing that to a climax when, on the cross, where he has been tortured and now is dying, he reaches out in love to those putting him to death. He prays for their forgiveness for their healing. What more extraordinary example of love could we expect, and what a challenge it is to us to try to follow that way of Jesus.

In fact, some of us might think it's impossible and that Jesus really could not have meant what we will hear today or have heard, and will hear throughout this week.

If we are inclined that way, well, we're not much different from the first Christians because at the church of Corinth, they were struggling with the same thing?did Jesus really mean it that you had to love your enemy, that you could not use force or violence, and had to give up all kinds of vengeance and hatred?

They had a difficult time believing it and acting on it, so Paul wrote to them and said, "Jesus did not send me to baptize, but to proclaim the good news, the message of Jesus."

That message is the language of the cross and of course, when God spoke the language of the cross, the world did not recognize God through this wisdom. So in fact, the Jewish people, many of them rejected it.

Paul says, "They asked for miracles," and then the so-called intellectuals, the Greeks, asked for a higher knowledge, "and yet here am I proclaiming a crucified Christ, one who gives up power and might, violence, and only reaches out in love. That's what I preach."

Then Paul says to them, "For the Jews, what a great scandal, a stumbling block they can't get over. For the Greeks, what nonsense. They think it's pure foolishness."

But then Paul says to them, "In reality, the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." What seems foolish in our ways is really a deep wisdom. And a forgiving spirit of love, which seems weak to many, is actually stronger than any violence.

This morning as we try to reflect on this and begin our celebration of Holy Week by committing ourselves to continue to listen to the word of God, to be changed by it, I invite you to listen in a special way when we proclaim the Eucharistic prayer, because it really sums up what is our calling as a disciple.

You remember these words, I'm sure, "Yes, God, you are holy. You are kind to us and to all. For this we thank you. We thank you, above all, for your son Jesus. You sent him into this world because people had turned away from you and no longer loved one another. Jesus opened our eyes and our hearts to understand that we are brothers and sisters and that you are the one God of us all, and Jesus brought us the good news of life to be lived with you forever in heaven, and he showed us the way to that life, the way of love, and he has gone that way before us."

Jesus shows us the way to share in the risen life that he brought for us. It's the way of love. He's gone that way before us and now we pray that we can hear his word and follow it, and go in that way of love always.

[Bishop Gumbleton gave this homily at St. Hilary Parish in Redford, Mich.]

Source URL (retrieved on *07/29/2014 - 04:29*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/peace-pulpit/go-way-love

Links:
[1] http://www.usccb.org/nab/041711.shtml