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# Filled with the spirit, we must be patient in waiting for the Reign of God

Thomas Gumbleton | Jun. 22, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

*Two people were confirmed during the Mass from which this homily is taken.*

Of course, as always, we need to reflect on the scriptures every Sunday, because it's a way of our growing and our understanding of our faith and our relationship with God. When we do that, we want to make sure that we do it within the framework of what we are celebrating. Today, we listen to the scripture in a special way to see how these scriptures teach us something about our lives as baptized and confirmed disciples of Jesus.
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It's very important for Jessa and Soci today to hear these words, but all of us who are baptized and confirmed disciples of Jesus need to listen once more and listen more deeply so that we make these readings apply to our lives as confirmed disciples. The first thing I think that's important is to challenge ourselves, ask ourselves, what really happens when we are baptized and confirmed? They really are two things that go together.

| Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time |
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| Ezekiel 17:22-24 |
| Psalms 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16 |
| 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 |
| Mark 4:26-34 |
| Full text of the readings [1] |

I think we have to go back a bit to another Gospel. That is, the Gospel of John and the Gospel that we heard on Easter Sunday. It was Easter Sunday night, according to John's Gospel, when Jesus came back to the disciples, who were hiding in the upper room because they were afraid. Jesus had been brutally murdered, and they were afraid that something like that might happen to them. So he comes into their midst.

They are, of course, amazed and overwhelmed. Very gently, he says to them, "Peace be with you." I'm sure that must have been very reassuring, because they had all failed so badly. They were hiding, but Jesus is there to bring them peace. Then, John tells us [Jesus] breathed on them and spoke these words: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they shall be forgiven; the evil you restrain shall be restrained."

Then [Jesus]e said, "As God has sent me, so I now send you." That's what happens at confirmation. In a very special way, Jesus breathes upon us and then assures us that we receive the Holy Spirit. Then he gives us a mission: "As God has sent me, I send you." There are a couple of things to note that are very important. First of all, the word that is used in that Gospel where Jesus breathed upon them, that word for breathed is only used one other time in the whole Bible.

It's used in the Book of Genesis to describe the creation of the first human beings. God breathed upon the clay that God had formed, and that clay became alive. So what Jesus is saying as he breathed upon them is, "You come alive." It's like a totally new creation that is bestowed upon you, a radical change in your life. I'm afraid we don't think about that often enough, but we really are radically changed when Jesus breathed upon us and gives us the Holy Spirit, and then he gives us the mission to do what he did.

Even in that incident on Easter Sunday night, He shows them something about what he does. He reconciles. "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven." He is forgiving them, and now he said, "You forgive others also.

Be a person who reconciles and brings peace." That's a very important part of our mission as disciples of Jesus. Then he goes on. He says, "The evils that you restrain will be restrained." He's telling us that we have to try to change things in our world, to restrain evil. How did he do that?

We can look at another part of the scriptures, the Gospel of Luke, and Jesus talks about how, when he comes back from his sojourn in the desert, where he was severely tempted, and he knows what his work is now. He tells the people in the synagogue at Nazareth, "The Spirit of God is upon me. God sent me to proclaim good news to the poor, to give the blind his sight, to set the downtrodden free, to heal the broken-hearted, and to bring God's year of jubilee, God's year of favor, into the world."

Jesus is going to change the world, transform it. That's what he's asking us to do. Every one of us, as a confirmed disciple of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, must reach out to the poor, give the blind his sight, help people to understand the message of God and God's love, heal the broken-hearted, give comfort, and give physical help to those who are ill. All of these are works of mercy that Jesus is asking us to carry out, but also to proclaim God's year of favor, God's jubilee year, when everything is changed.

All debts are forgiven and wealth is redistributed so everyone has a full, human life. That's a tremendous task that Jesus has taken on that he now passes on to us. We might in a way be overwhelmed by it, as we think about what God is asking of us, but then, if we listen to today's Gospel, the Reign of God is what will happen when everyone allows themselves -- even all of creation -- is under the dynamic power of God's love.

That's the Reign of God, and we might be overwhelmed when we think it's our task to try and make that happen, but it's not ours alone. That's why the parable of the seed is so important today, because Jesus says, "The Reign of God is like this: A farmer goes and scatters seed. It's buried in the ground and then, the farmer doesn't make it grow. God makes it grow and brings it to fullness." So when we accept this task, which is the task of Jesus, to transform our world into the Reign of God, God is the one who will be doing the work.

God asks us to share in it, to help to transform our world. God works through us if we open ourselves to God. It can be a very slow process, of course, and we know it's very difficult to bring about the kinds of changes that would really make the Reign of God happen, a reign of justice, peace, love and joy, but we have to be patient. That's what the farmer does: He has to wait for the seed to grow. We have to use the gentleness and the love of Jesus to make it happen.

I remembered an experience as I was reflecting on this Gospel, about how sometimes we use ways that are not the way of Jesus to try to make good things happen. This has to do with our war in Iraq, which is still going on. It's been going on since 1991. One time when I was over there during the second war, I was talking with a Dominican priest, a native of Baghdad, and he was saying to me, "You know what that problem is?"

He was so discouraged by the fact that his country was being destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people were killed. He was being very honest, and he said, "The trouble with you Americans is you want everything to happen too quickly. You think just with your power and your might, you can change everything and make peace happen. It won't be that way." He reminded me, "We had a culture here of 5,000 years. Your country has been around for 200, and yet, you think you can do everything in the world."

It is an attitude that we sometimes carry with us, that we can do it all. Sometimes we even use violence to try and do it. That's not the way of Jesus. We have to be patient and let God work through us to bring about the change that will make the Reign of God happen. So if we listen to that parable and try to follow patiently, waiting, but working together with Jesus, we can transform our world into the Reign of God.

The second parable just reminds us in a way that this is the smallest of seeds, the mustard seed, and yet it grows into a big bush. There's something about the mustard seed that makes it not very good is you're trying to raise

other crops because that bush takes over and begins to push against the other crops you're trying to make grow. It kind of dominates the whole garden or field. That is like when we try to insert ourselves too much into what is happening and we sometimes become too belligerent in trying to make good things happen.

We're a little bit like that mustard bush: We push against the good things that God wants to happen in our world. Again, we have to be patient and let God do the work through us, and join in that work, following the way of Jesus. When we do that, and we can do it when we're filled with the Holy Spirit, then I think we can proclaim as Paul does in our second lesson today: We feel confident always. Paul is aware that God is working through him.

Even though he's been discouraged many times, he's been persecuted and put in jail, threatened with death, he said, "We're still confident. We are exiled right now from the Lord because we're on this earth and living by faith, not by sight. We dare to think that God will bring God's kingdom to fullness through us. So whether we have to keep this house that is our body or lose it through death, we only wish to do what the Lord wants." That's what I hope each of us will say today. Filled with God's Holy Spirit through our baptism and confirmation, we will do what God wants us to do in sharing in the work of Jesus to transform our world into the Reign of God.

[Homily given at Holy Trinity Parish, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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