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Our call is to do the will of the God of peace

Thomas Gumbleton | Dec. 27, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

On this last Sunday, the beginning of this very short final week of Advent, our readings help us to focus on who is to come. As we remember the birth of Jesus, who is this Jesus and what does Jesus ask of us? We should remember that the Gospels were written decades after Jesus had lived among the chosen people, had been handed over to death and had risen from the dead. The Gospels are expressions of the witness of the first followers of Jesus to who he really is: the Lord, the Son of God, not just son of Mary, but Son of God in power as Paul describes him.

In the Gospel today, Luke has Elizabeth cry out, "How is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" That term, Lord, was used of Jesus after he has risen from the dead, again, acknowledging Jesus as Son of God in power. In the other lessons, especially the first lesson from the Book of the Prophet Micah, although speaking within a historical context about a time when the chosen people had fallen away from God and were living in sin and corruption without good leaders, Micah, this ordinary shepherd, is inspired by God to proclaim God's word as prophet.

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Micah 5:1-4a
Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45
Full text of the readings [1]

He speaks about one who is to come from Bethlehem. "You, Bethlehem, Ephrata, so small that you are hardly named among the clans of Judah, from you I shall raise the one who is to rule over Israel, for he comes forth from of old, from the ancient times. Yahweh, God, will abandon Israel till such time when she who is to give birth has given birth, and then the rest of God's people will return to God, return to the promised land rebuilt." Matthew in his Gospel arranges for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, because Matthew and the disciples, the followers of Jesus after his resurrection, now see that that one who was proclaimed by Micah to rescue the chosen people, that one is now Jesus, Son of God.

So Matthew, by arranging for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, shows how this is a renewal of what had happened hundreds of years before, when God brought forth a king -- David -- who was born in Bethlehem, who rescued the people and led them in the ways of God. A beautiful thing about this one who is to rescue the people is he shall be peace, Micah says. How marvelously Jesus now takes the place of this king who came to bring peace. Jesus shall be peace. It's a beautiful description of who he is whose birth we remember as we prepare now to celebrate the birth once more.

As we listen to the scriptures today, we not only are helped to be made aware that this one, this tiny infant born -- according to Matthew -- in Bethlehem, is Son of God, but we are also challenged to put our faith, our trust, in this Son of God. Elizabeth says to Mary, "Blessed are you who believed, who trusted that God's word would come true." This is the most important thing about Mary, as we celebrate her presence and her part in this coming of God into our human history. She was one who believed, who trusted, who can say -- as Luke describes the angel speaking with her -- who can say to the angel, "Be it done unto me according to your will."

Whatever God willed, Mary said, "Yes." Later in the Gospel, there is this beautiful passage where a person, a woman in the crowd, cries out in praise of Jesus, just astounded by who he is, his kindness, his love and all that he does. She cries out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, the breasts that nursed you," talking about Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Jesus responds at that time, "No, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

Jesus is saying that Mary is important, beautiful and a model for us, most of all not because she is the mother of Jesus in the physical sense, but because she was the most faithful disciple of Jesus, who heard the word of God proclaimed by Jesus and followed it. That, of course, is now what our challenge is as we hear these lessons today and as we prepared on this final Sunday of Advent to be ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus once more into our human history: to hear the word of God and keep it.

In fact, in our second lesson today, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks about Jesus as one who himself did not offer any longer sacrifices of animals. Christ says about God, "You did not desire sacrificed offering. You were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings." Then Jesus said, "Here I am. It was written of me, 'I will do your will, oh God.' " Mary is the one who listens to the word of Jesus and follows it, and Jesus himself, in his humanness, is the one who says, "I will do your will, oh God."

Not animal sacrifices, burnt offerings and so on, but Jesus -- one of us in every way except sin, one who has entered into our human history in our name and is a model for us -- says, "I will do your will, oh God." Mary says, "Be it done to me according to your will." Jesus says, "I will do your will, oh God." This is what is really our call as we celebrate once more this birth of Jesus, Son of God coming into our world, that we must listen to God's word, do that word, act upon that word. "I will do your will, oh God."

We are at a time in history right now where our whole nation it seems is trying to come to terms with the terrible violence that was perpetrated a matter of days ago in Connecticut. Those 20 children were massacred in an indescribable kind of violence. We abhor and understand how evil that is, and we are beginning to try to come to terms with it. Why, in our nation, does this happen? It seems to be happening more and more frequently, these terrible outbursts of violence. There is thought about changing laws about guns and doing better in treatment of mental health and so on, but I suggest that we have to look deeper.

We have to look into our national culture and is it not a culture of violence, where violence is so prominent: the violence of abortion, the destruction of human life at its very beginnings, but also the violence of war, the violence of using drones to kill innocent people in countries that we are not at war with, the violence of war that has gone on since 1991,where hundreds and millions of people have been made exiles and refugees, and hundreds of thousands killed. These are wars in which we are involved and our weapons are being used to destroy and kill.

Most victims are innocent people, and we seem not to abhor this or protest against it. We seem not to understand that this Jesus who we celebrate rejected violence. So I ask us today as we prepare again to celebrate the birth of Jesus, the one who is our peace, to look into our culture and how we are part of that culture, and try to see how violence has distorted so much, how far we have come from the way of Jesus which is the way of peace, forgiveness and love. It's only if we go into the depths of this problem that we're going to really find a way out of the violence that seems to be overwhelming us.

This is the time when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, Prince of Peace. Can we not take the time to reflect on what Jesus taught us, hear his word of love overwhelming violence, love transforming violence -- hear that word and follow it? If we do that this Sunday in this short last week of Advent, and especially as we celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas, we will begin to find a path to end violence and to bring peace into our lives and into our world.

[Homily given at St. Leo Church, 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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