

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jan. 18, 2007 | The Peace Pulpit

As I mentioned before the first lesson, Isaiah, one of the great prophets in our tradition, proclaimed what truly was only a dream at the time that he spoke and that led me to think about, obviously, one of the very great prophets of our time, Martin Luther King Jr., whose holiday and birthday we celebrate this week. As a great prophet, he, too, often proclaimed what was only, at the time, a dream. So I share some of his dream with us again today. These words some of you probably remember were spoken on the Mall in Washington before hundreds of thousands of people in August of 1963 when our nation was caught up in civil strife and racism, hatred, and violence were all happening in a terrible way. Dr. King proclaimed:

I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons and daughters of former slaves and the sons and daughters of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today! ?

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this

faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day?

When we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black and white, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

An amazing dream, wasn't it? The really marvelous and beautiful thing is that so much of it has come true. We have broken down many of the barriers that separated us. We have made great advances in racial harmony, racial justice, in the harmony between various religious groups, bringing about gender equality and sexual equality - we have made progress. But our dream is not completed. So today we need to reflect on our Scripture lessons as the dreams that they are that need to be accomplished yet within our midst. Dr. King showed us a way to proclaim what needs to happen - by dreaming about it and then making it happen by working for it. We too need to dream.

Isaiah, that great prophet whose teachings made up our first lesson had a dream. "The nations will see your holiness and all the kings your glory. You will be called by a new name, which the mouth of God will reveal. You will be a crown of glory at the hand of Yahweh, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will you be named 'Forsaken.' No longer will your land be called 'Abandoned,' for you shall be called 'My Delight;' your land 'Espoused.' For God delights in you and will make your land God's spouse. As a young man marries a virgin, so will your Builder marry you and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so will your God rejoice in you."

Isaiah was proclaiming those words at a time when the city of Jerusalem, about which he was speaking, was a heap of ruins and the Chosen People, to whom he was addressing this dream, were in exile and yet Isaiah could see what might happen, what could happen, and so he proclaimed his dream. It took over 90 years but gradually the people worked and God was with them and they made the dream be fulfilled.

In the Gospel lesson today, in a sense, Mary has a dream. She has a dream that people will never be in need. It's a very particular moment, a very particular time, when her friends have a very embarrassing need. She has a dream that this could be taken care of. She has a dream that her son, Jesus, can bring about what needs to happen. At the moment, she seems to be rebuked by Jesus, but she doesn't give up her dream, does she? Instead, she simply says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you," trusting that in Jesus, her dream could be accomplished and of course, it was, and the people celebrated. The people rejoiced in the fulfillment of that dream.

But as we listen to that Gospel lesson, we should realize that Mary's dream, as it happened in that incident, is a much larger dream. The Scriptures often use a wedding banquet as the sign of fulfillment of all of God's promises, a sign of the fulfillment of every human person, a sign of overwhelming joy, when the wine of love is superabundant, when peace will happen. That's the larger dream that is contained in today's Gospel.

As we listen to Dr. King, listen to Isaiah, heed the example of Mary, it's important for us to develop our own dream, to see a vision of what could be - what will be, if we allow God to work in and through us. The first dream that I would suggest for all of us that is very important comes to mind because, as we all know, this past week President Bush declared that we are going to go further into war - that somehow war will resolve the problems in the Middle East. It's a foolish, even evil, step to take for our nation. We need to have a different kind of dream - that dream I shared with you before. It's very beautifully put by Pope John Paul II when he was addressing hundreds of thousands of young people in Spain in 2003 very shortly after this second Persian Gulf war had started. He proclaimed to those young people, "Be artisans of peace." He said, "Have a dream. Dream that peace can happen." Peace can happen when you reject war, when you reject violence, when you do not respond to violence with violence but with love.

Surely that's a dream - but it's also a promise. It's God's promise. It could happen, if we as individuals spread this dream, but we have to have it deeply within our own hearts. Then we could give up war. We would no longer believe that war resolves problems. We would turn to love and make peace happen. Oh, so many will say, "That's an impossible dream." But I'm sure people said that to Isaiah, people said that to Dr. King, but they did not give up their dream. They worked on it. They made it happen with God's help and so can we if we really commit ourselves to that vision - commit ourselves to be artisans - artists, who have a vision, who have a dream, to work to make it happen.

A second dream that's suggested to me today is a dream about our own parish community. Very recently I received a letter from a person who lives in Chicago. He writes:

I have been receiving your homilies for several years from the National Catholic Reporter Web site. Two years ago, my wife and I decided to travel to St. Leo's for Easter Mass. As we approached the neighborhood, I felt as if I were traveling through Hiroshima, but when we arrived I was astonished. I found myself surrounded by a loving community of all types who welcomed me as if I were an old friend. There were people who were actively involved in caring for the hungry, the homeless, the imprisoned and all others who were in need. This was truly a Christian community. When we returned to the Chicago area, my wife and I decided to make a monthly contribution to St. Leo's, and we were quite surprised to start getting thank you letters from St. Leo's. They were thanking us. We only gave them a little money while they showed us how to be better persons. They are the ones who should be thanked.

He's talking about all of you, talking about this community, and it's true, isn't it? It's a beautiful community where we have so much, and we have to have a dream that we're not going to let this community die. We're not going to let it disappear - so we have to have a dream that we can make it continue to grow, continue to be a sign of God's goodness and God's love in this part of Detroit.

If we listen to the commentary that's in this Christian Community Bible about the second lesson today, we'll get some direction on how you and I - all of us - can make the dream happen. Remember the second lesson was about St. Paul telling the Christians at Corinth that, "God blesses you with many gifts and it's the Spirit of God that gives you these gifts." The commentators say, "If Paul said that these services came from Christ, people might think that most important in the church is the authority of those who govern in the name of Christ and at times are considered his vicars." He's talking about bishops and priests. "But these gifts and ministries are related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows where it pleases and multiplies among all believers gifts and initiatives that renew the church. The mission of the ministers - that is bishops and priests and lay ministers - is not only to govern and command the church but to recognize the true work of the Spirit in the community. The Spirit shares as it pleases. The Spirit gives the church what it needs at the right place and the right time."

What that commentary is telling us and what we need to convince ourselves of is that God's Spirit is pouring forth gifts - not on the so-called vicars of Christ - the hierarchy - but upon all of us, upon every one of you, a whole variety of gifts. If we take hold of those gifts and use them, we can fulfill the dream, make our community continue to be what the gentleman from Chicago says it is - a community that really shows the love of God, carries on the mission of Jesus, helps to transform the world into the reign of God. It can happen, if all of us continue to have this dream and let those gifts of the Spirit work through us and bring them to fullness within us. We can make this dream happen. Our parish will go on. Even if we are lacking a priest, we can make it happen because God gives the Spirit to all. God gives the Spirit to you, and with all those Gifts we can continue to be what God has enabled us to be so far - a community of love, a community of sharing, a community that truly brings the love of God to people in our midst.

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