

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 20, 2022

Prayer for Reading 1:

Lord, let us do no harm, never return hit for hit. Guide us to where you live in our souls. God of pardoning love, help us always to forgive.

Reading I: 1 Sm 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

In those days, Saul went down to the desert of Ziph with three thousand picked men of Israel, to search for David in the desert of Ziph. So David and Abishai went among Saul's soldiers by night and found Saul lying asleep within the barricade, with his spear thrust into the ground at his head and Abner and his men sleeping around him. Abishai whispered to David: "God has delivered your enemy into your grasp this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not need a second thrust!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not harm him, for who can lay hands on the LORD's anointed and remain unpunished?" So David took the spear and the water jug from their place at Saul's head, and they got away without anyone's seeing or knowing or awakening. All remained asleep, because the LORD had put them into a deep slumber. Going across to an opposite slope, David stood on a remote hilltop at a great distance from Abner, son of Ner, and the troops. He said: "Here is the king's spear. Let an attendant come over to get it. The LORD will reward each man for his justice and faithfulness. Today, though the LORD delivered you into my grasp, I would not harm the LORD's anointed."

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13

R (8a) The Lord is kind and merciful.

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

R The Lord is kind and merciful.

He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills.

He redeems your life from destruction crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R The Lord is kind and merciful.

Merciful and gracious is the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in kindness.

Not according to our sins does he deal with us, nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R The Lord is kind and merciful.

As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.

R The Lord is kind and merciful.

Questions for Reading 1:

1. In what way does this reading teach us about magnanimity (which means ‘generous in overlooking injury and insult, rising above pettiness and meanness’)? Can you think of any saints/prophets who were or are magnanimous? Do you know any magnanimous people in your own life? What about you?
2. Saul was mean but David showed respect for him because he was anointed. Can you show respect for someone yet disagree with him/her? What do you think the outcome is when neither side respects the other?

Prayer for Reading 2:

Christ, we are only earth. But you open us to you. We go up to heaven through you. Heaven comes down to us through you. You are the gate, the gatekeeper, the one who opens us to make all the earth holy.

Reading II: 1 Cor 15:45-49

Brothers and sisters: It is written, *The first man, Adam, became a living being*, the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.

Questions for Reading 2:

1. Name some of the ways we bear the image of the earthly Adam.
2. Hans Urs von Balthasar said that Christ “cut a path” for us as grace ascending and grace descending. Is Christ just as much creation’s highest response to the Father as he is the Father’s Word to creation. Does the heavenly Adam coming together with the earthly Adam cut a path for us? What does bearing the image of the heavenly Adam allow us to do?

Prayer for Gospel:

Injured? Offer the other cheek. There is only embrace and kiss. Don’t lend and demand repayment, you say. There is only give all your money, or whatever you have. There is no get-that-cloak-back when someone takes your coat. Instead, buy the person a wardrobe. God of inexhaustible love, pour your gift of love on us, over us and within us, all of it, shaken down, overflowing. Let us love each other well, with your own prodigal, radical, love.

Gospel: Lk 6:27-38

Jesus said to his disciples: “To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who

strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

Questions for Gospel:

1. Jesus goes one step farther than David’s “don’t kill” your enemies. He says, “love” them. Don’t expect anything back when you lend, and if someone takes something of yours, give that person much more. Who practices absolute generosity like this? Who do you know besides God who comes close? A parent with his/her child? With grace, can we think of everyone as our family?

2. “Be merciful, just as you Father is merciful.” According to Pope Francis in the text below, what does being merciful do for us? Why do you think mercy is a gift?

I remember that this theme was chosen for the first Angelus that I had to recite as pope: mercy. And this has remained very much impressed on me, as a message that I would always have to offer as pope, a message for everyday: mercy. I remember that on that day I even had an attitude that was somewhat “brazen,” as if I were advertising a book about mercy that had just been published by Cardinal Kasper. And on that day I felt very strongly that this is the message that I must offer as Bishop of Rome: mercy, mercy, please, forgiveness.

God’s mercy is our liberation and our happiness. We live [through] mercy and we cannot afford to be without mercy. It is the air that we breathe. We are too poor to set any conditions. We need to forgive because we need to be forgiven. Thank you!

Pope’s Message: Mercy is the very heart of God, March 18, 2020

In Exile by Ron Rolheiser

Stuck In Traffic

There's a famous billboard that hangs along a congested highway that reads: "You aren't stuck in traffic. You are traffic!" Good wit, good insight! How glibly we distance ourselves from a problem, whether it is our politics, our churches, the ecological problems on our planet, or most anything else.

We aren't, as we want to think, stuck in a bad political climate wherein we can no longer talk to each other and live respectfully with each other. Rather we ourselves have become so rigid, arrogant, and sure of ourselves that we can no longer respect those who think differently than we do. We are a bad political climate and not just stuck in one.

Likewise for our churches: we aren't stuck in churches that are too self-serving and not faithful enough to the teachings of Jesus. Rather we are Christians who too often, ourselves, out of self-interest, compromise the teachings of Jesus. We aren't stuck in our churches, we comprise those churches.

The same is true apposite the ecological challenges we face on this planet: We aren't stuck on a planet that's becoming oxygen-starved and a junkyard for human wastage. Rather it's we, not just others, who are too careless in how we are using up the earth's resources and how we are leaving behind our waste.

Admittedly, this isn't always true. Sometimes we are stuck in negative situations for which we bear no responsibility and within which, through no fault of our own, we are simply the unfortunate victim of circumstance and someone else's carelessness, illness, dysfunction, or sin. We can, for instance, be born into a dysfunctional situation which leaves us stuck in a family and an environment that don't make for easy freedom. Or, sometimes simple circumstance can burden us with duties that take away our freedom. So, metaphorically speaking, we can be stuck in traffic and not ourselves be part of that traffic, though generally we are, at least partially, part of the traffic we're stuck in.

Henri Nouwen often highlighted this in his writings. We are not, he tells us, separate from the events that make up the world news each day. Rather, what we see written large in the world news each night simply reflects what's going on inside of us. When we see instances of injustice, bigotry, racism, greed, violence, murder and war on our newscasts we rightly feel a certain moral indignation. It's healthy to feel that way, but it's not healthy to naively think that it's others, not us, who are the problem.

When we're honest we have to admit that we're complicit in all these things, perhaps not in their crasser forms, but in subtler, though very real, ways: The fear and paranoia that are at the

root of so much conflict in our world are not foreign to us. We too find it hard to accept those who are different from us. We too cling to privilege and do most everything we can to secure and protect our comfort. We too use up an unfair amount of the world's resources in our hunger for comfort and experience. As well, our negative judgments, jealousies, gossip, and bitter words are, at the end of the day, genuine acts of violence since, as Henri Nouwen puts it: "Nobody is shot by a gun that isn't first shot by a word. And nobody is shot by a word before he or she is first shot by a murderous thought: Who does she think she is!" The evening news just shows large what's inside our hearts. What's in the macrocosm is also in the microcosm.

And so we aren't just viewers of the evening news, we're complicit in it. The old catechisms were right when they told us that there's no such a thing as a truly private act, that even our most private actions affect everyone else. The private is political. Everything affects everything. The first take-away from this is obvious: When we find ourselves stuck in traffic, metaphorically and otherwise, we need to admit our own complicity and resist the temptation to simply blame others.

But there's another important lesson here too. We are never healthier than when we are confessing our sins; in this case, confessing that we are traffic and not just stuck in traffic. After recognizing that we are complicit, hopefully we can forgive ourselves for the fact that, partially at least, we are helpless to not be complicit. No one can walk through life without leaving a footprint. To pretend otherwise is dishonest and to try to not leave a footprint is futile. The starting point to make things better is for us to admit and confess our complicity.

So the next time you're stuck in traffic, irritated and impatient, muttering angrily about why there are so many people on the road, you might want to glance at yourself in rearview mirror, ask yourself why you are on the road at that time, and then give yourself a forgiving wink as you utter the French word, *touché*.

<http://liturgy.slu.edu/index.html>

(main site from which the Bible study is composed)