

“THE MINDSET OF CHRIST”**Sunday, February 14, 2010, 6th Sunday OT, Cycle C****Fr. James Thompson, O.P.**

Jesus said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.” A few Sundays ago there was a couple nearly my age asking for help. They were exhausted, hungry, and out of money. Their money for getting an apartment had been stolen and they couldn’t move in. He had cracked ribs and was in great pain, yet had been refused admission to Tempe St. Luke’s hospital. I did not help them. There are lots of reasons for that. Most people who heard the whole story would say I had already gone above and beyond the call of duty with them. But later that night it rained heavily. The fact is in that particular hour of need, I did not give them any direct help, knowing that probably no one else would. And that really bothers me.

The Greek word for ‘poor’ in this Gospel passage doesn’t just mean being short of the good things in life. “Destitute” would give a more accurate sense of the implications of this word. This couple was destitute, and I did not help. I doubt that they thought right then that the kingdom of God belonged to them.

Clearly something is wrong here. Where does the blame fall for such misery? This is just one example of the thousands in distress right now on the streets of Tempe and surrounding cities. Is it their own fault? Yes, you could say that. In this and probably most cases some really poor choices were made. Is it Society’s fault? Yes, you could say that. Our society is very keen on a heartless so-called market economy that guarantees a certain percentage of losers. These particular losers are, quite literally, the cost of doing business. Again, is it my fault? Yes, you could say that. Yes, it is my fault to the extent that my own sins of omission have contributed to continuing injustices. Yes to the extent that my sins of commission have dulled me to the call of Jesus Christ. Yes to all, there is blame enough for everybody, the poor, society, and me individually. If we model ourselves according to the world rather than on Christ, our desires are inevitably twisted, and we contribute each in our own ways to the violence and injustice around us.

But you know what? This whole game of seeking to place the blame is itself a major part of the problem. Jesus doesn’t call us to find other’s faults and point them out. He calls us to live our lives according to the New Law that he preached in today’s Gospel reading, to believe the good news of the risen Lord as told in our reading from St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthian Church, and to trust in God as the first reading from Jeremiah highly recommends.

What is Jesus NOT saying today? Jesus is not saying that being destitute, starving and persecuted are in themselves blessed states. That would be absurd. He IS saying that the destitute, starving and persecuted are not as tempted to the illusion of self-sufficiency as are the satisfied. The desperately poor are already primed to trust in God. Jesus is not saying that having worldly goods, a full stomach, and a merry disposition are intrinsic evils. He IS saying that if we place our focus and faith on property, food, and fun, then we are FAR from the Kingdom of God. In another place Jesus sums up the New Law in this way: “love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus is also saying today that if we are happy, sated, and have more than we need, then we are directly or indirectly contributing to despair, hunger, and destitution because we are not loving others as Jesus loves us.

The reign of God or the rule of the God’s Kingdom is both familiar and terribly alien. Jesus invites us to a whole new place that is NOT of this world. I don’t mean a trip in an alien spaceship, but a venture outside the boundaries of the dysfunctional dynamics of worldly humanity. The new law is not a new set of external rules to follow. It is not law like any other law, but just coming from Jesus instead of Moses or Rome or Washington DC. No, the Kingdom of God is a world where no one keeps score, no one seeks to get even, and where forgiveness and reconciliation are the norm, not the occasional heart-warming exception.

Scripture describes this New Law, or this New Covenant with God, in many ways: the covenant written in our hearts rather than on tablets of stone, replacing our stony hearts with human hearts, living in the Spirit, and also Christ living within us. But sometimes we hear such religious language so much that it helps to paraphrase it. For my purposes here, I’ll call it The Mindset of Jesus.

The Mindset of Jesus sides with the poor, identifies with the poor, and has nothing to do with the pomp of pride and elitism, or the corruption of vested interests. This Mindset does not keep track of injuries and hurt feelings, is never motivated by prejudice. If we have the Mindset of Jesus, we wouldn’t dare to gossip, tear people down behind their backs, or puff ourselves up by comparison with our supposedly moral inferiors. For those living in the Spirit, that is, having the Mindset of Jesus, any rebuke or challenge they feel moved to give is deeply motivated out of sincere love for the other. If not, it is worldly, that is vengeful, wrathful, or self-righteous, which is the opposite of the Mindset of Jesus Christ.

Why am I so bothered by my own behavior with that needy couple a few Sundays ago? It bothers me because it shows that sometimes even on Sunday I am not living out of the Mindset of Jesus. Probably most of us have not taken up full residence in that strange world of the Kingdom of God. But I sure hope that most of us here at

least make our visits in the alien territory more frequent, and stay longer, as the years go by.

I have to say though, that there is plenty of evidence that many of you already do spend considerable time in that godly space, and seek in your own ways to claim more territory for God's Kingdom. There is plenty of evidence that you do identify with the poor rather than the Empty Promises of Satan. Our own St. Vincent de Paul chapter helps numerous people each month, and some of you are quite generous in supporting them directly. The Catholic Worker ministry, Andre House in downtown Phoenix, is particularly happy about the participation of Newman students and parishioners. Others are involved in political advocacy for the vulnerable and destitute. Some purposely support our Newman Grounds ministry as a model of just economics. Others seek conversion of heart and mind through involvement with the JustFaith program.

That said, another opportunity presents itself this weekend, and that is the annual Charity and Development Appeal. Supporting this effort is the right thing to do, even in the light of disappointment with Diocesan leadership. Are we really so hard-hearted that we would rather nurse our own wounds rather than do our part in the larger collective work of our own Diocese? Our goal is 100% participation, at least in having everyone promise to pray for the projects of the Diocese. If you cannot even fill out a card simply to promise to pray for the work of the larger Catholic Church in this diocese, then as a pastoral leader and preacher I have clearly failed to inspire the Mindset of Jesus in this particular instance.

With these reflections on the Mindset of Jesus in mind, I invite:

5:00 *Melissa from Catholic Charities*

8:45 *Anna from Catholic Charities*

10:30 *Anna from Catholic Charities*

7:00 *Melissa from Catholic Charities*

9:15 *Melissa from Catholic Charities*

to come forward with a testimony about a ministry funded in large part through the Charity and Development Appeal.