

24th Sunday of Ordinary Time “The Violence in our World and the Violence inside”

Bishop Frank Schuster

My friends, on Friday our country commemorated the 25th anniversary of the attacks on September 11th, 2001. The readings this 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time Cycle A, are the same readings we had the Sunday after that horrible day. That was a really, really, hard Sunday as many of us over thirty remember, and the Gospel reading that Sunday made that weekend even harder in some respects. It was good medicine though, very good medicine. And yet, these reading also seem very applicable to the times we live in today.

My friends, today we also remember all who have died by suicide, not only this past year, but all those we carry with us into this Cathedral. And with a spirit of compassion and mercy toward those who succumb to anguish of mental illness, and with all the violence in the world today, I think it is fair to say, the world we live in also suffers from suicidal inclinations. It is a flaw in our human make-up, and more evidence than we need for the existence of the original sin we are all born with. Our appetite for destruction is real, to coin a phrase. We can't save ourselves from it. We can't. We need a savior. We need Jesus, not the warped version of Jesus blasted out by megaphones by the arrogant in front of T-Mobile Park and Lumen Field. For the record, they drive me crazy. We need the real Jesus, the Jesus the Gospel proclaims, especially the Gospel this weekend.

On a personal level, I don't know about you, but for me it just feels like everyone around us is angry about something. Spouses and family members too argue with each other over ultimately unimportant matters. There is a lot going on in our world today. It can be overwhelming at times. Whenever we find ourselves feeling angry about something going on, we can almost always find a reason to be justified for it. However, do you know what is missing in all the energy we spend with being angry about this, that, or the other thing? Love. Love is what's missing. The love that is missing is sometime due to personal sin. Sometimes the deficit of love inside is due to the scourge of mental illness that can be just as deadly as diabetes. However, there is a real deficit of love in our country and world today on all sides. Sometimes the biggest deficit of love is towards the person we see in the mirror.

Back to the suicidal inclination of our world today: our first reading from Sirach says it, right? “Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight.” Let's hear that again. “Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs the tight.” In our Gospel reading, Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus answers, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times”. This is a bitter pill to swallow. It certainly was the Sunday after 9/11. It certainly is today as we grieve our loved ones. It is medicine that we can choke on. However, it is also medicine we desperately need. We all need it.

As an aside, the commandment to forgive doesn't mean that we don't protect ourselves and our family members or seek justice when injustice happens. I believe it is important to briefly touch on this. Seeking justice is important. The desire to fix what is wrong in the world also speaks to what is good about us. The commandment to forgive however does demand that

we do so in a spirit of Christian love, even if it is a tough love. If we are feeling hurt by someone right now, we must still love them as hard as that is. Even when we don't feel like loving our enemies, and those who hurt us, we must find a way to choose to love them as Christ loves us. What does that look like? Love looks like, at the very least, praying for those who hurt us. Love also looks like praying for their salvation. That is what God wants. Why don't we?

However, as much as we can get riled up by what we see going on in the world today, and in our own hearts, in my experience the people who really hurt us in this life aren't the faces we see on television. The people who really hurt us, who sincerely challenge our ability to forgive, are usually the people who are closest to us, perhaps at work, perhaps at home, people who we thought cared for us, and the people who we thought loved us. Those are the people who can hurt us the most. And when they do, it really hurts, and we can be tempted to carry anger and resentment forever.

What does wrath and anger eventually do to us though? If we let it, anger and wrath will eventually eat a hole through our stomach and compromise our health. In time, anger and wrath will even eat a hole through our soul. How is that good for us or for anybody? And so, Jesus suggests something extremely radical. He suggests forgiveness. That's the medicine we need right now. Forgiveness.

Again, forgiveness doesn't mean that we don't seek justice that is objectively fair for the circumstance. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we necessarily restore trust to someone who hurts us either until that trust is earned or supernaturally given. Forgiveness does mean that we make the effort to see the people who have wronged us with Jesus' eyes. Jesus died on the cross for everyone, not just me. Forgiveness means praying for the salvation for those who wronged me. And if we find that too difficult, we need to pray for the grace to pray for the salvation of those who hurt us. Why is that? St. Paul answers that question in our second reading, "None of us lives for oneself...we live for the Lord". We live for the Lord! This is our calling, if we want to call ourselves disciples. It sure beats living for ourselves.

And so, to wrap this up, who are the people we need to forgive seventy-seven times? Who are those people in our lives who have hurt us, who cause us to brood over injury day after day? For us in this cathedral this event, and I will just come out and say it, for some of us, could it be for those who succumbed to depression in our lives who died by suicide? Could it be hatred for ourselves for being unable to spot it in time or otherwise powerless to prevent it. We can ask ourselves: are we better off harboring that pain day in and day out or are we better off just letting God be God? Let God be God! Let God sort it out. Furthermore, are we better off blaming somebody else for the misery we carry around everywhere we go, or do we dare recognize the truth: that we cannot be the author of own happiness or unhappiness in life. Again, we need God. Tonight, in this cathedral, we need God.

And so, in the craziness of the world we live in, when we remember those who have died by suicide this past year, maybe we can draw consolation of the Good Thief crucified next to Jesus. Let's look at the cross right now in our sanctuary and see in our mind's eye the Good Thief crucified next to him. Recall that the reason why he was there was because his life too was marred by an appetite for destruction. He even said himself that he deserved to be there for his

crimes, but Jesus did nothing wrong. I find it very interesting that he wasn't even physically baptized and yet in the last moment, a moment that even his own family did not know about, turned his gaze toward Jesus. He didn't even ask for forgiveness so deep was his pain. He only said the prayer we should have in our hearts in moments of despair. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus, so great was his love in his time of pain and anguish, turned his gaze directly to him, and said the words we all want to hear someday, "Amen, I say to you, this day you will be with me in paradise." These are the words we pray all our loved ones who have gone before us hear, "Amen, I say to you, this day you will be with me in paradise."