

16th Sunday- B Deacon Pat Hall 2018

JEREMIAH 23:1-6; EPHESIANS 2:13-18; MARK 6:30-34

Homilies are vehicles for searching the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/072218.cfm>

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WOE !

Now that's a sobering way to wake up to Scripture. That doesn't sound like a good thing. It is a warning of sorrow and distress. From the lips of Jeremiah, woe is a warning to the shepherds who mislead and scatter, who do not care for those for whom they are responsible. But Jeremiah promises hope, hope in the coming of the one shepherd who is wise, just and right, who will save and make us secure... "The Lord our justice."

We see the Lord our justice on that shore when Jesus took pity on that vast crowd, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

Now I react kind of personally, maybe even guiltily, when I am exhorted with woe. It is humbling and makes me wonder if I have ever been legion with those who mislead, scatter and act without care. You see as your deacon, I am the Bishop's man assigned to assist your pastor. While your pastor shepherds from in front, my role as an assistant is to follow up from behind.

I find my encouragement, security and solace when I shepherd as my savior shepherds. It is my trust in his direction that protects me from misleading, scattering and not caring.

I find it so disgusting when I see those with power and position abuse that privilege with self-service and bullying. It rankles me.

I remember in 5th grade when I was exposed to bullying. I was fortunate that I was of a size that I wasn't a target of bullying myself, but I had friends who were terrorized by a bully and asked my assistance in their defense. In looking back, that may have been the seed of what would later lead to a career in law enforcement.

As a law enforcement officer, I responded to many kinds of calls for service. Some times I witnessed great sacrifice and good will. Many times I found bullies.

I love people who love people.

I hate people who hate people.

Now, I can imagine Jesus saying something about loving people. But I cannot imagine Jesus saying that he hated anyone. I guess I am a work in progress, but,

with God's grace, I am working on it and have been for some time.

There came a time when I had to protect bullies.

It was when a group of Neo-Nazis and KKK adherents were staging a demonstration of their bile and vitriol in Bronson Park.

Now, I am glad that in our community that the number of Nazis and KKKers are few and far between. Their demonstration of hate, however, motivated hundreds of counter-protesters, thus we had all the ingredients for a major disaster.

The Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety is of course responsible for maintaining the peace. To do so, KDPS fenced off an area separating the two groups and positioned officers between them. I was among the officers assigned to protect the people... and the racists' constitutional right to free speech.

It got ugly and contentious as expected. I remember the counter-protesters chanting, "The police and the Klan go hand in hand." I understand where their frustration comes from, but it still hurt.

In the end, the Nazis and Klan finished their diatribe and officers escorted them into the bus that took them out of the area. The event concluded without disaster.

Of course we weren't protecting just the bullies. We were trying to ensure the safety of all present. No one would be safe if a riot erupted. We weren't just protecting their right to spew hate, but defending all of us, all of our rights to freedom of speech. It was a lesson to me that in my civic responsibility, that I am to protect all, even the bully.

Jesus, of course, calls us to a higher standard:

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another (Jn 13:34)

Jesus did not say we could hate people who hate.

Paul, in his letter heard today, reminds us that by the blood of Christ, he has made us one. He reconciles us all with God in one body through the cross and then... this is the part that struck me... **put enmity to death.**

I am not to hate people who hate. I am to allow enmity, the hate that creates enemies, to die.

Why is it that when we find someone to be different in their economics, their manners, their dress, their language or faith... why we are more prepared to oppose than to embrace? To prevent confusion, I am not saying that I take on for myself what is different, but why am I reluctant to embrace the different person? May it be fear of the different? My Lord is quoted at least twenty times in the Gospels telling

us, "Do not be afraid."

Father James often says that our parish boundaries do not define who gets to come to worship here, but show us whom we are called to serve.

We have people who come to St. Mary's from six counties. We gather here for a range of wonderful divine reasons. We have come together as one worshipping family to love and serve the Lord and to serve Him where we find Him in the need of others.

But those others are really, no, really different.

The houses in this neighborhood were built by Polish immigrants. They built this church with their very hands. They no longer live here.

Our immediate neighborhood is mostly African-American; we are mostly not. Sixty percent of Eastside children live below the poverty line. Our children are amply provided for, sometimes with difficulty, but mostly so. We are mostly Catholic here; most of our neighbors are secular, but if believing, do so in Protestant or Muslim traditions.

So how do I, Pat Hall, serve these people, when I am white, Catholic and affluent?

If I approach as a do-gooder, I may be seen as arrogant, as someone who thinks, "I got it and you'll be better when you got it, too." I've been there, done that. Not so good.

I have found something that does good. It is when I recognize the divine image of God reflected in the other. Instead of me thinking I have to convert the person in front of me, I imagine that God has placed a secret for me in every person I meet. When I search for that message, I usually find it. And it is divine. The other person is not an object of my do-gooding, we are both sharers in God's love. We may continue to disagree and to have many seemingly irreconcilable differences, but we can cooperate and wish good for the other.

I no longer hate people who hate. I have learned through duty to serve those with whom I disagree. I am practicing how to have compassion for those whom I oppose.

It is fear and enmity that separates us. Paul tells us today:

For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh.

Jesus did so for all humanity. May we, the parish named for the Holy Mother of God, be Jesus' grace for all we meet and serve.

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