Peace Results from an Open Heart

Isaiah 66:18-21 The Lord comes to gather nations of every language. The glory of God is to be found in God's relationship with all God's creation.

Luke 13: 22-30 Entrance is through the narrow door. Who will enter the Kingdom of God will surprise us – not the expected.

Reflection:

Jesus is continuing on his way to Jerusalem. In his teaching along the way, we go from the narrow door to the image of infinite doors (coming from east and west, north and south) with some of the last becoming first. So, what does this have to do with Catholic Social Teaching?

- The presence of God's reign requires a faith response. We are called not to become mired in worldly values, but to take the prophetic stance and not only proclaim, but live the Reign of God. What values in my life need conversion?
- It is God's narrow gate, not ours. Long-held assumptions are challenged. In what ways do I try to control the gate rather than letting God?

Action:

We are being told that this is a time of opportunity. We don't have to live in fear. So much violence is due to our fears – of the stranger, of a different point of view, of loss of control, of loss of our way of life. It is never too late to experience metanoia, a conversion of heart. Peace in my heart will lead to peace in the world. We can start one issue at a time.

- Learn more about the history and our foreign policy in regard to Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel or Palestine. Reflect on what you have learned in light of the bishops statements. (www.usccb.org).
- Gather a group of friends and reflect on war and peace in our Catholic tradition. Together prepare a call for a responsible transition in Iraq And deliver it to Senators Brown and Voinovich.
- Go to www.justiceforimmigrants.org or www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/immigration/ to understand the call for comprehensive immigration reform. Write a letter to Senators Brown and Voinovich asking that this issue be revisited.

"The foundations of authentic peace rest on the truth about God and man." Pope Benedict XVI - 2006 World Day of Peace.

Peace Is In Inclusive Communities

Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29 Humility is a key virtue. The Kingdom of God turns our world upside-down: it is the humble person who is great. The humble person understands and accepts the limits of one's abilities.

Luke 14: 1, 7-14 Humility is key again. We don't assume a high place, but start at the lowest and wait to be invited to a better position. Invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame to your banquet – the Kingdom is about relationship with the lowest and most vulnerable.

Reflection:

We often forget that Jesus turns worldly values upside-down. The poor and most vulnerable are the most important – the option for the poor in Catholic Social Teaching. This parable looks at proper perception. When we try to judge others, we actually become the ones judged.

- We are not called to charity here, but to a wider, more inclusive sense of community. That, ultimately is the greatest advocacy: inclusion in a caring community. **How inclusive is my community? Do those who are different feel welcomed and accepted?**
- Inclusion into the world community is understanding that our way is not the only way. We need to also look at the way we try to initiate change. **Have I thought of US foreign policy and what it says about us as a people?**
- Inclusion in community is about speaking up for the voiceless in nonviolent ways. If we want peace, as Pope Paul VI stated, we must work for justice: a responsible transition in Iraq, a Middle East resolution that respects all peoples involved, a peaceful end to the genocide in Darfur, and an end to human trafficking. **What action have I taken recently that provided a voice for someone who was powerless?**

Action:

Write a letter to the editor or to your Congressmen speaking up on behalf of someone who is voiceless. It could be the voice of victims of war, of human trafficking, of genocide in Darfur, of undocumented workers, or the Palestinians and Israelis.

"There is the great reality of the communion of the universal Church, found among all the peoples, the fabric of Eucharistic communion that transcends the boundaries of culture, civilization, peoples and times. There is this communion, there are these "islands of peace" in the Body of Christ. They exist. And they are forces of peace in the world. "

Pope Benedict XVI - Statement of July 23, 2006 on How to be a force for peace in the world.

Peace Is Courage and Humility

Wisdom 9:13-18b We cannot know the way of the Lord.

Philemon 9b-10, 12-17 Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as family, not as property. It is up to Philemon.

Luke 14:25-33 Renouncing possessions for the sake of Christ is difficult but necessary. We must take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Reflection: The call is that of Jesus, but the decision is ours. We decide how we journey through life. Commitment is real only if it is freely made, knowing that it will not be easy. If we are to obtain peace, we need courage and humility: courage to be different and humility to know we cannot go it alone. We need God and one another.

- Possessions are more than what we have. They include our attitudes, our belief system, our comfort level, our friends, etc. Renouncing our possessions is more powerful when we need to renounce ingrained attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs. **We may need to let go of our individual needs for the sake of the common good.** Jesus is about the common good – a phrase we actually heard more about in the last election season. When we work toward the common good, we have a better chance at peace. When we remain focused on ourselves, we invite conflict.
    - **What attitudes are standing in my way of being open to the way of Jesus?**
    - **How do I feel about people who are different- either culturally or religiously?**
    - **How well do I listen to another perspective on issues?**
- There is a radical cost to this commitment. But, we need to be open to the Spirit. We need to also trust that the wisdom of God is reflected in our being Church.
    - **Am I willing to pay the cost of speaking out for human dignity and respect?**

Action: Speak out about an issue in some way this week:

- Explain the issue to ten friends and take action together.
- Write a letter to your senators or representatives.
- Gather a group and visit one of the congressional offices in your district.

"War, with the mourning and destruction it brings, has always been rightly considered a calamity that contrasts with God's plan. He created everything for existence and, in particular, wants to make a family of the human race."

Pope Benedict XVI - July 22, 2007-Appeal for Peace.

Peace Is About Forgiveness and Seeking the Lost

Luke 15: 1-32 A mix of images of God is found here**:** Prodigal Father/Son, Good Shepherd, Woman in search of her missing coin. All speak of the concern of God for each and every one of us, but with a focus on the one who is lost.

Reflection: This is a good week to ask ourselves where we need to repent. Every so often, we need to be told we can change. What has gone before will be completely forgiven and we can start fresh. We can acknowledge that we do need to change our attitudes. We can acknowledge that we haven't been good about taking action on injustice, that we haven't been very inclusive and welcoming.

War in Iraq: and Afghanistan: The views of many Americans have changed. In the shadows of 9/11, the immediate reaction was to chase the terrorist wherever they were. Like the bishops who stood against war have said, we cannot go back. We can only go forward – a most difficult forward – in finding a responsible transition.

Genocide in Darfur: It is easy to ignore the genocide in Darfur. We keep hearing of agreements and peacekeeping forces. But, the government of Sudan has not honored any of these. China's money and need for a relationship with Sudan has become an obstacle for peace. We can just acknowledge we haven't been concerned and start to take action now.

Human Trafficking: Here is an issue far from almost all except the victims. This is slavery and we see it as far from us.

Immigration: We all know what we have been hearing here. Even the term illegal rather than undocumented says a lot.

In this section of Luke, we are also asked to look at our corporate selves. How are our communities and nation like the Pharisaic attitudes portrayed here? What can we do to change that?

Action: Take action on one more issue this week. Let your voice be heard.

"In view of the risks which humanity is facing in our time, all Catholics in every part of the world have a duty to proclaim and embody ever more fully the "Gospel of Peace," and to show that acknowledgement of the full truth of God is the first, indispensable condition for consolidating the truth of peace. God is love which saves, a loving father who wants to see his children look upon one another as brothers and sisters, working responsibly to place their various talents at the service of the common good of human family."

Pope Benedict XVI - 2006 World Day of Peace.

Peace Is Being the Wise Steward

Amos 8:4-7 Denunciation of abuse of the poor. (cheating, trampling, etc.)

1 Timothy 2:1-8 Call for prayers for all authority for the sake of peace.

Luke 16:1-13 The wise steward: what we do in small matters, we will do in larger matters.

Reflection:

This week we look at what kind of stewards of our world we are**.** Wealth could be power, influence, leverage, reputation, abilities and skills, creativity, and everything we admire as an American society. When we expand our concept of wealth, the parable takes on new meaning. We very easily manage our own abilities, etc. to conform to what we see as beneficial to us and our family.

The questions for reflection:

How do we define our interests and that of our family?

How do we define our family? broadly or narrowly?

Action:

Catholic Social Teaching gives us guidance on this with the themes of life and dignity of the human person, the option for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, rights and responsibilities, and the call to family, community, and participation. Apply these themes to one of the issues of war and peace with Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Middle East, human trafficking, basic needs in Africa, genocide in Darfur, and immigration reform. Look at your priorities, your practices, your attitudes, and your actions. **Decide on one area that needs change. Become the voice of the powerless in regard to that area and find one action you can take through an organization that works for justice and peace in that area.**

"If we look at history, we can see the great saints of charity who have created "oases" of this divine peace in the world, who have always rekindled his light, and were always able to reconcile and create peace. There are the martyrs who have suffered with Christ, have given his witness of peace, of love that places a limit on violence."

Pope Benedict XVI – Statement of July 23, 2006 on How to Be a Force for Peace in the World

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Peace Is Loving Who Is at Our Gate

Amos 6:1a, 4-7 Woe to the complacent!

1 Timothy 6: 11-16 Be righteous; keep the commandments. Seek after integrity, piety, faith, love, steadfastness and a gentle spirit.

Luke 16:19-31 Story of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar

Reflection:

Ah, woe to the complacent! Even inaction is an action. When we refuse to "get involved" or find the issues too far away, we pay the consequences of letting poverty remain, of wars started, of people dying from lack of good drinking water or HIV-Aids, or life as usual with employers and undocumented immigrants. So often, we are that rich man who refuses to see the beggar at our gate. The Catholic Charities Office of Migration and Refugees is having problems finding help for some of the new refugees because they are "not like us." We could not pass any real comprehensive immigration reform, instead focusing on the migrant agricultural workers because it was easier to talk about how they are a drain on our economy.

Peace is about loving the unlovable. Peace is about loving those we consider our enemies. There are many examples of people we ignore – but, eventually we do experience the consequences of ignoring them. The resulting situations pose even more difficult problems and greater conflicts. Jesus showed us that love is the only way.

Who is the beggar at our gate who we are ignoring? How can we change this? What can you do personally to reach out to someone different in need?

Action: Visit our Diocesan web site, www.catholic-action.org, or the Catholic Charities site, www.catholiccharitiesusa.org, for information on issues and actions you can take. Both web sites also have links to others. You can also visit www.networklobby.org, www.bread.org, www.sojo.org, www.savedarfur.org, and www.usccb.org for issues and actions. DO SOMETHING THIS WEEK.

"The beauty of nature reminds us that we were told by God to cultivate and care for this garden that is the earth. If humanity lived in peace with God and each other, the earth would really look like a paradise."

Pope Benedict XVI - July 22, 2007 Appeal for Peace

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