

Trinity Sunday 2020

Exodus 34: 4b-6, 8-9

2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

John 3: 16-18

As if any of us could handle one more thing our nation has been confronted with racism, once again. And this time, young people and old people, rich people and poor people, liberal people and conservative people, black people and white people, and people of every religion and people of no religion demand a remedy for this plague that has destroyed many lives and has infected our culture to its core for far too many years.

As protesters break from social distancing regulations and “shelter in place” orders in cities all over our country, it is a sign that silence and separation are no longer acceptable means to eradicate the “virus” of racism that is just as insidious and dangerous as COVID-19.

To be honest, I would love to fast forward through 2020 and jump past all this mess. I used to think 2019 was a bad year but this year is absolutely hideous—and we’re not even half-way through it! I know I’m not alone in this sentiment. There is a part of each of us that wish things were different than they are, but “wishful thinking” is actually part of the problem. We have made excuses for bad behavior or oversimplified complicated problems or brushed them off as having nothing to do with “me” but the reality we face, as Christian people living today, is that we must face reality if we are to follow the commands set forth by St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians which we hear today:

***Mend your ways,
encourage one another,
agree with one another,
live in peace,
and the God of love and peace will be with you.***

Could there be a more perfect scripture passage for us to hear, in light of the current events in our country, than this one? Does it seem to you (as it does to me) that St. Paul is writing to us and not the Corinthians? This is evidence that the Word of God is alive and that it speaks to us now just as much as it spoke to people living two thousand years ago. Remember the Parable of the Sower? The Word of God is the seed that falls everywhere—on good soil, on rocky ground, on thorns and even on the streets.

Mend your ways.

The Church in Corinth was in trouble. The message Paul brought to them in his first letter was being undermined by an opposing teacher who was bringing dissension and false teachings into the community. They were at each other's throats, tensions were running high, and the Church was deeply divided. In this, his second letter, Paul encourages the people of Corinth to remain faithful to the Truth and he reaffirms his deep love for them.

Differences and conflicts are inevitable. We all have our own perspectives, motivations and inspirations and sometimes they clash and sometimes one perspective dominates another which can lead to inequality and oppression. Holding to the Truth is not easy especially in a society that rejects absolutes or finds no meaning in them. But this is not an excuse for us to give up. Divisions are not mended just because we want them to be or because we speak words about them. "To mend" is a verb and Paul puts the onus on the people of Corinth that they must act and work to resolve differences and divisions that are destroying the Body of Christ.

We can't just say that we want everyone to get along as we stand at a distance and somehow think that we are not part of the problem. We have to work together in order to be part of the solution. We have to learn to accept people for who they are and stop judging them according to the color of their skin or stereotyping them by what we've known from our own personal experiences or from someone else or what we hear on the news. As Catholics, we believe that EVERY person (without exception) is made in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, EVERY person (without exception) is good. We must work for unity by setting aside our prejudices and honoring the dignity of EVERY human person (without exception).

Encourage one another, agree with one another.

Something I've noticed (and I've even preached about it in the recent past) is that healthy dialogue is on the verge of extinction. We have become a culture that refuses to listen to anyone who disagrees with us. There used to be a forum where people with varying opinions could speak to one another openly and honestly with respect for each other and walk away on good terms knowing that there are inherent differences between us and that there are different perspectives, but that we have something to learn from each other. These days, however, we are deeply divided by racial, political and religious lines and we prefer to associate with people who agree with us. It's just easier that way. But if we only communicate with people who think like us or look like us then how does that built unity? And for us disciples, how does that create an opportunity for evangelization?

We may never come to an agreement on certain topics but at least we can listen to one another and we can have empathy for others and try to understand what they

are saying even if we can't relate to it personally. Despite our differences we can all agree that we are in this together. When one life is dishonored, all life is dishonored. And let us not forget in his Letter to the Galatians, St. Paul writes these words: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) We are all ONE in Christ Jesus.

Live in peace.

"Peace" is a biblical term. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace is *shalôm*. Literally, it means "to be complete or whole." *Shalôm* is used in many different ways in the Old Testament. It can mean general prosperity or well-being (Gen. 15:15; Ps. 4:8), safety or success (2 Sam. 11:7; 18:29), harmony among friends and family members (Zech. 6:13); and harmony among nations (1 Kgs. 4:24; 5:12). When used as a greeting or as a blessing it conveys the notion that one is wishing *all* good things to the person addressed (2 Sam 15:9).

Wishing all good things to all people. This again is a message we so desperately need to hear today. So often, we are preoccupied with what is good for ME that we forget that we are also called to be concerned for what is good for others. The greatest commandment is to "love God" and the second is "love your neighbor as yourself."

We tend to associate the word peace with words like harmony or security or reconciliation but peace is also about "willing the good of others." Will we ever have perfect harmony, security or reconciliation? I hope so, but in the meantime, we can strive for peace by "willing the good of others." And we don't have to wonder if it will happen because we have the power to make it happen right now!

This is what Jesus did on the cross for us. He did not die for his own good but for ours. He died for our salvation—the ultimate good, eternal life—that we might know peace in this life and in the life to come.

And finally, if we do all these things—mend our ways, agree with one another and live in peace, "**the God of love and peace will be with us.**"

Today is Trinity Sunday and what better way for us to think of these things than in the context the Blessed Trinity. Each of the three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—subsist within the inner life of God to be truly distinct relationally, but not as a matter of essence or nature. Each in the godhead possesses the same eternal and infinite divine nature; thus, they are the one, true God in essence and nature, not "three Gods." Yet, they are truly distinct in their relations to each other.

Think of this in terms of our relations with one another. Each of us are distinct and unique individuals with particular backgrounds, upbringing, cultural

differences, languages and dreams and aspirations (just to name a few). Yet we relate to each other not just based our experiences or appearances but on the grounds that we are part of one human family.

It's interesting that in this passage Paul infers that "if" we do these things then God will be with us. But what if we don't do it? Is God still with us? Well, God is God no matter what we do or don't do. His immutability does not depend upon us. But let's look at it another way, God is always present but we can make his presence known by our willingness to mend our ways, encourage one another, agree with one another and live in peace.

My brothers and sisters, we need to make God's presence known in our world today. It's up to us! We who worship the Triune God must relate to one another with a respect that honors the dignity of every human person made in the image of the One who is love and peace, now and forever.

Very Rev. William L. Novak, V.G.

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