

14th Sunday of Ordinary Time

We live in a culture that seems to me to relish violence. For example, we find it in the movies we watch; whether in the theater or on Netflix. The most popular movies especially for guys seem to be “action movies,” which mostly portray some type of violence. The most popular video games also seem to be built around violence. The news that we hear and read about daily seems to be filled with stories of violence. How does all this violence affect you in the way that you think and live or in the way that you interact with others?

The scripture readings today present us with images of gentleness rather than violence. For example, in the first reading from the prophet Zechariah, we encounter a king entering Jerusalem. He is not mounted on a huge white horse suited for warfare, but on an ass, a beast of burden used to haul stuff to market. In this way that king is sort of like Pope Francis who travels around Italy in a Ford Focus rather than in an armored limousine. The image of the king here is one gentleness.

In the gospel reading Jesus describes himself not as the King of Kings or Lord of Lords but as gentle and humble. Let us take a look at three scriptural examples of gentleness. The first example is from the story of the woman caught in adultery. There is no doubt that she is guilty. Jewish law requires that she be stoned to death. Jesus, however, challenges those who have stones in their hands “Whoever is without sin cast the first stone.” No stones are thrown that day. And so Jesus tells the woman, “No one condemns you and neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

What about us? Do we tend to follow the letter of human laws no matter where they lead us? Or do we first consider the welfare of the people involved?

A second example of gentleness is found in Jesus' parable of the Lost Sheep. One sheep out of a hundred wanders off and is lost. Experience shows that sheep that are lost don't return. They just die. What is a shepherd to do? Should he risk the health and lives of ninety-nine sheep in search of the lost one or not? In the parable the shepherd goes after the lost sheep and rejoices when he finds it.

What do we do if we are a student and notice at lunch time that a new kid in school is eating by herself – do we leave our group of friends and eat with the new kid? What do we do when we have a friend or loved one who is physically or mentally ill and is becoming more and more dependent on us? Do we spend less time at work, at home or at leisure activities in order to spend more time with our friend or loved one?

A third example of Jesus' gentleness is found in his parable of the Prodigal Son. The younger son demands his share of the inheritance. He leaves home and spends it foolishly on wine, women and song. When the son returns home broke his father welcomes him back and even throws a party for him.

What if you are a kid and your best friend drops you as his or her friend only to return later asking to become a best friend once again? What do you do? What if you are a parent and your child hangs around with a group of friends that you disapprove of, or marries someone whom you don't like, or moves out of the house and no longer communicates with you? What do you do when that child seeks to repair the damage that he or she has done to the relationship?

A king rides on a beast of burden. Jesus describes himself as gentle and humble. How about you? How important is gentleness in your life?