

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jun 16th 2015

Recently, I was cut off in traffic by another driver who deliberately ran a stop sign due to what I can only conjecture was impatience on their part. In that instant, I had my latest enemy. Anger immediately coursed through my veins at the injustice and insensitivity of this act; this affront on my personhood. Needless to say, the last thing on my mind was to offer a prayer for this individual!

As he so often does, Jesus expects something from me in today's gospel which flips my human nature on its head and leaves me scratching my head saying, "Really, Jesus, really?! You expect me to pray for my enemies?"

"I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (MT 5:44)

I find myself saying back, "Man, Jesus, that's a tall order. That's tough!"

Jesus walks the talk, as he always does, in a very profound way from the cross when he has the courage, compassion and faithfulness to pray, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." (LK 23:34) Think about that for a moment. The man is being nailed to a tower of wood and hung to suffocate to death and he prays forgiveness for the perpetrators. Incredible.

I remember seeing a bumper sticker on a car once that gave me some real pause. It read, "When Jesus said, 'Love your enemies,' I think he probably meant don't kill them."

This is a timely message here in Nebraska as our lawmakers recently voted to ban capital punishment in our state. In a very real way, I believe this is what Jesus' message of loving our enemies is about. Sure, it's not easy, but very little of what Jesus expects of us is cut and dried in our complicated world.

A sadness I have is that we so often want to draft up ever-shifting boundary lines between who is "us" and who is "them" (while making sure we stand within the "us" boundaries). Jesus invites us to use prayer to rise up beyond that which separates us. And regardless of how we define who our "enemies" are in our life, Jesus does not let us off the hook. No matter how vile they may be, he tells us we must

still love them.

A number of years ago on a visit with the Jesuit School of Theology to a protest of the School of the Americas (SOA) housed at Fort Benning, Georgia I got a glimpse into how we might do what Jesus is asking of us from a butterfly. When I approached “the line” I was met by three freshly painted brown chain-linked fences crowned with barbed wire and slapped with “US Property: No Trespassing” signs.

I was drawn to sit at the base of a flagpole from which the banner of the United States of America slowly twisted and turned in the afternoon breeze. I crossed my legs. I opened the upturned palms of my hands. I dropped my eyelids. I “disappeared.” This is a term that had an entirely different reality for graduates of the School of the Americas who were trained on how to help any rabble-rousers “disappear.” In fact, hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans had been tortured, raped, assassinated, “disappeared,” and massacred by SOA graduates. The big difference for me was that I was given the freedom to exist that afternoon in the repetition of one word—“peace.” It came into my conscience as I let my mind rest. I felt my presence grow beyond my body. The people sitting near me in prayer and I were absorbed into each other. The brown fences turned into sieves through which the color of our energy flowed freely. The men on the other side of the fence were no longer on the other side because the concept of “side” disappeared. In peace, all was one. As I slowly “reappeared” and my eyes opened, I was not surprised to see the fence still standing there, brown and heartless.

I stood up gently on one leg as blood rushed into the other that had long fallen asleep. I paced gently back over to “the line.” Then, as my eyes turned back toward where I had been sitting, it all made sense. A lone, bright orange butterfly rose up and began flying. It turned and returned. Then, it did something bold—it flew over the fence. The funny thing is that no alarms went off and the insect was not arrested on trespass charges for crossing the line! Of course it wasn’t...it was simply doing what all of creation does—living out the peace from which it was created. It did not see a man dressed militantly nor a woman holding a cross bearing the name of a murdered Salvadoran nor the brown fence that separated them. Rather, it disappeared. It disappeared into the folds of creation. It floated upon the breath of autumn. It reflected the colors of unity.

If only we could learn more from butterflies.

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