

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 8th 2015

As a Jesuit who now lives in Nebraska, I am happy that finally Nebraska becomes the 19th state in the United States that has abolished the death penalty. However as an Indonesian citizen, I am sad because my country still practices the death penalty to punish people such as drug dealers and murderers. For Nebraska, the death penalty had been so costly and it did not reduce crimes at all. Instead, the money should be used for improving social welfare and so to reduce crimes. In Indonesia, people still strongly believe it will reduce crimes and drug abuse. No matter what the reason is, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation at the communal and society level is still very expensive. People as community still have a desire to take revenge on those murderers, drug smugglers, and the like, with various assumptions and reasons; among them is the fear that these criminals would commit similar crimes in the future. If at the communal level, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation are still very expensive, how is it at the personal level? Do I really have those three in my heart?

In the first reading today, we hear, “The brothers did not know, of course, that Joseph understood what they said, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. But turning away from them, he wept.” It is perhaps the first story of forgiveness in the Old Testament. Instead of applying the law of retaliation – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth – which is more common in the Old Testament, the story applies more advanced morality, namely, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the face of hatred and sinfulness. As we know, in the chapter before this reading, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, but with God’s grace he was granted an important position in the Pharaoh’s court. He had a chance to take revenge by rejecting his brothers and sending them home without any food. But on the contrary, “he wept.” This was a tough situation. On the one hand, he felt the anger burning inside him, due to the treatment he has received from them. On the other hand, his heart was moved by his brothers’ presence. He might have thought that he would not see his brothers again, but here they were!

Joseph’s decision to show mercy, forgive, and reconcile with his brothers signifies the triumph of love over sin. This is what our mother Church always reminds us of and encourages us to do. Yet we sometimes forget and fall again into the law of retaliation because we find psychological satisfaction in taking revenge and punishing others. Thanks to Pope Francis, who explicitly echoes this ultimate teaching of the Church in his recent bull of indiction of the extraordinary jubilee of mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus*, we now see clearly that our world today needs merciful hearts who are able to forgive and reconcile. He concedes, that sometimes it is really hard to forgive. “And yet, pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully” (*Misericordiae Vultus* §9).

Since mercy is in the heart of the Church’s teaching, our call to discipleship, as it is depicted in today’s gospel, also includes the call to exercising mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Jesus did not give the Twelve an order to punish or kill those who are sick because they have sinned against

God, but he gave them authority to cure them from every disease and every illness. The disease and illness do not only refer to the physical reality but also the moral and spiritual one. Jesus wants us to show the face of our merciful God who forgives and reconciles, because mercy has first been shown to us. Therefore, as Pope Francis says, mercy becomes a criterion for ascertaining who God's true children are (*Misericordiae Vultus* §9).

As the people who always try to live the call to discipleship, perhaps each of us should weep, like Joseph in the first reading. I weep because I have let my anger become hatred and vengeance, which alienates the mercy of God; I weep because I have found for myself the mercy and forgiveness of God through my neighbors. Let mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation fill my heart, and so fill our hearts as community. Therefore these three will not be expensive anymore, and we as a community can show mercy and forgiveness, and reconcile with those who have hurt us.

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