

January 24, 2016

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**And Jesus said, 'The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free. Today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.'**

*Today, is this scripture passage being fulfilled in our hearing?*

This year has been proclaimed by Pope Francis as a "Year of Mercy." This sounds so wonderful. Who wouldn't like to be surrounded with the grace of mercy. But we have to ask is this actually happening. Is this scripture passage being fulfilled in our hearing, or is what we are hearing causing us, as happened with Jesus, to turn & walk away.

There is an article by Robert Mickens in the January 18, 2016 issue of the National Catholic Reporter titled, "Pope Francis, a not-so-clear, but very present danger." It is to the point. This is a brief of what the article says.

"Misguided and depraved fanatics are not the greatest menace to life as we currently know it. There is a far more dangerous threat out there. It is Pope Francis. No, he is not waging a reign of terror. But he is prophetically disseminating a message that -- if we actually heed it -- could easily unsettle and change our lives in ways far more radical and destabilizing than anything unleashed by Islamic State militants.

"He's doing so on multiple levels and on various fronts. And he is meeting pockets of resistance in every sector of society, even inside the Catholic church. There are Sunday Mass-goers who bristle at his insistent calls for a major reform of the "*economy that kills*," including the application of greater regulations on free markets. There are wealthy, generous benefactors of Catholic dioceses, people who try to be as responsible with their resources as they have been hard-working in earning them, who are offended by his anguished cries for a more just distribution of wealth, having in mind families from the [global south](#) who are suffering in poverty and are torn apart by civil unrest and war.

"There are good and decent citizens of all faiths and of no faith at all, compassionate people who are offended by Francis and believe he is plain wrong in demanding that Europe and North America throw open their doors to migrants and refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

"There are serious Catholics who are scandalized by the pope's endless exhortations to embrace -- and not dare to judge -- those whom the laws of their church define as unclean or living in sin. They and others are horrified by Francis' conviction that the Roman church has no choice but to engage in dialogue with Christians who reject certain of its dogmas, with people of other faiths who don't believe in Jesus Christ, with those who do not believe in God, with skeptics and even with those who are the church's sworn enemies.

“Every time the pope condemns arms manufacturers and the weapons trade, he infuriates those, especially in the United States, including Catholics who insist on the legality of gun possession at home and massive military action around the globe.

“So does he enrage the self-righteous when he rails against capital punishment and even against lifelong prison sentences, insisting that prisons and other correctional facilities should be transformed into centers of rehabilitation instead of those that merely impose punishment.

“There are those who believe that the pope is abusing his teaching office when he enters into the debate over climate change and sides with those who believe irresponsible human activity is the culprit.

“But the most pernicious threat that Francis poses to so many in our society and our church is linked to his obsession with mercy. Yes, mercy. It is a far more dangerous weapon than terrorist bombs. That's because the practice of mercy requires that we forgive those who have hurt us, even in horrible ways. It means that we pardon them rather than demand, according to human justice, that they restore exactly what they have destroyed (even if that is, more often than not, impossible).

“Mercy and forgiveness are the exact opposite of retaliation, vindication or even retribution. Just as Jesus says we must not judge, but must turn the other cheek and love our enemies, calling us to be merciful goes against our innate sense of justice and fairness. It is true that those who have harmed us or who have broken the law must be held accountable for their wrongdoing. But without mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation, there can be no healing, for either the victim or perpetrator. By refusing to show mercy and pardon to those who have attacked or abused us, we -- whether a nation, an institution, a particular group or a single individual -- can too easily end up clinging to our wounds with pride and a false sense of righteousness.

“The only way to heal these wrongdoings is by letting go of them. Francis' call for greater mercy in the world and in our lives is not some fuzzy, sentimental attempt to cover over faults or sweep wrongs under the carpet. Rather, it is a challenging -- yes, even threatening -- message that will upend our lives if we truly embrace mercy and offer it to others.

“The church, as the universal sacrament of salvation, needs to take up this summons to mercy. This is the great intuition of Francis. If it does not threaten some aspect of our lives -- no matter if we identify as a traditionalist, a progressive, or anything in between -- then we probably aren't listening.”

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