

February 19, 2019
Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send?
Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said, "send me!"**

Where do you want to send me?

Last week, we considered something Oblate Fr. Ronald Rolheizer said, that all of us are incurably restless, consumed by a fire that cannot be quenched until we remove all the barriers we put up against coming into full communion with each other and the world.

We recognize this as the work of religion. Religion comes from the Latin, *re-ligare*, which means to realign, to tie back together. Our word, ligament, comes from this. Religion is about bringing together what has been torn apart. This is hard work. Perhaps this is why over the centuries Christianity has focused so largely on "what" Christians believe rather than "how" Christians live. It is a lot easier to talk about doctrine than about practice.

We don't see preoccupation with doctrine in Jesus, but instead an invitation to join a movement that demonstrates God's goodness to the world. This is harder than practicing a religion that focuses on magical, external, one-time transactions instead of the universal pattern of growth and healing—which is always through loss and renewal. This pattern of healing through loss and renewal disappoints and scares most of us, even many clergy who think death and resurrection is just a doctrinal statement about the lone Jesus.

God is right here, in the middle of all this, continually creating things - us - to yearn for and seek the good. That is the eternal pattern, God forever breathing into us an ever deepening desire to bring back together what we have torn apart.

This is backed up by an article from the Catholic News Service, titled, "*Pope: Respect, Dialogue key for Peace between Christians, Muslims.*" It is about Pope Francis' visit to the United Arab Emirates. It can be found in the current issue of NCR. It reads in part:

"VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis says his recent visit there, while brief, was a new page in relations between Christians and Muslims at a time when conflict and violence threaten the goal of lasting peace. Recalling his Feb. 3-5 visit to Abu Dhabi, the pope said during his weekly general audience that the joint document signed by him and the grand imam of al-Azhar and chair of the Muslim Council of Elders was a step forward in promoting dialogue and brotherhood.

"In an age like ours,' he says, 'in which there is a strong temptation to see a clash between Christian and Islamic civilizations taking place, and also to consider religions as sources of conflict, we wanted to give another clear and decisive sign that, on the contrary, it is possible to meet, respect and dialogue with each other, and that, despite the diversity of cultures and

traditions, the Christian and Islamic worlds appreciate and protect common values: life, the family, religious belief, honor for the elderly, the education of young people and much more.'

"Arriving at the Paul VI audience hall, the pope was in good spirits. In his talk, he reflected on the historic nature of his visit, which was the first time a pope visited the Arabian Peninsula. He also noted that 800 years after St. Francis of Assisi's visit to the Sultan at the time, providence wanted 'a pope named Francis' to fulfill this visit. 'I often thought of St. Francis during this visit,' he said. 'He helped me to keep in my heart the Gospel, the love of Jesus Christ, while I lived the various moments of the visit.'

"The pope also thanked the Catholic community 'who animate the Christian presence in that land.' Departing from his prepared remarks, the pope recalled meeting the first priest to arrive in Abu Dhabi and who 'founded so many communities there.' At 90 years old, he said, the priest 'is in a wheelchair, blind, but his smile never falls from his lips, a smile of having served the Lord, of having done good.' This visit, Francis said, 'belongs to God's 'surprises.' Let us praise him and his providence, and let us pray that the seeds sown may bear fruit according to his holy will.'" The end of the article.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "*Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?*" " *Here I am,*" I said, "*send me!*"

Is not our faith sending us out to remove all the barriers we put up that prevent us from being in full communion with the world, including the Muslim people? I realize this topic is a hard one to look at, it is filled with raw emotion for a lot of reasons for a lot of people. But isn't that all the more reason for us to look at this. This is the work of religion - to put back together what has been torn apart.

It is sometimes said that religion is not practical, that it doesn't deal with the real world. If that is the case, then it is our fault, not that of religion. Arriving at the bitter divisions we face today comes from the fact that the work of religion has not been employed in the past. We cannot afford to continue making that same mistake. Our religion is very practical - it is sending us out to follow the path of mercy and compassion because that path leads to reconciliation, and not annihilation.

That sounds right, one might say, but we still face the question of how can we manage this in the face of so much anger and blame going on around us? I have one simple suggestion we can take that will help move us into the path of peace and not division - "*don't listen to the same news report more than once a day!*" Too much of what is called news today is not meant to inform but to manipulate. That's a technique used in brain-washing - to maintain a constant barrage of the same message - over and over and over. Just follow this "once-a-day" prescription

- "*don't listen to the same news report more than once a day*". That will give our exhausted holy spirits time to regain our balance and find the desire for peace at work in our hearts.

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Where? Perhaps to a place we have not been to before