

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary time, 2016

1. Over the years, the U.N. Peace-keeping mission has learned that peace is not so much about what goes on between two sides, but is more about how the two sides inner act with one another.

This has to do with the deeper, less visible aspects of conflict--it has to do with memories of past betrayals and whatever the level of hope that they may have for the future.

Often our peace efforts fail because we don't wish to examine the real basis for the conflict.

Just as a husband & wife might start yelling at one another over dirty plates left on the kitchen table, but the real problem is that one of them doesn't feel appreciated or respected by the other.

2. In today's gospel, Luke writes what he refers to as an "ordered account" of Jesus' life. And in one long sentence, Luke provides the background for writing of his entire gospel.

Like the UN peacekeepers, Luke's account of the life of Jesus tries to dig deeper into what is really going on.

He wants us to look beyond the miracles to what is actually being said about Jesus.

Luke's introduction of Jesus is unique among the gospel writers because it is the only place where the author steps out upon the stage and uses the pronoun "I." I attest to this...

And in doing so, he followed the highest literary style of his day. It's as if Luke said to himself, "I am writing the greatest story ever told and nothing but a personal testimony is good enough for it."

Furthermore, it is most significant that Luke was not satisfied with anyone else's account of Jesus Christ--He must tell his own version, even though he relied heavily upon Mark's gospel.

After all, real religion is never a second-hand thing; it is personal discovery, a personal relationship; thus Luke answers the question: Who is Jesus for me? And it seems to me that is what Catholic education is all about; learning to ask significant questions; learning from, and debating with, the masters who have gone before us. We are fortunate to have such dedicated educators' at all three schools, who do their best to prepare our kids for the challenges to come; we have gifted programs in the sciences and the liberal arts. But always hanging in the air is the question "Who is Jesus for me?"

Now back to today's gospel, Luke's account is both scientific and personal. He writes as a physician and as a man who profoundly believes in Jesus about whom he is writing.

3. The major contribution to the "greatest story ever told" is that through Luke, Jesus is seen trying to prove the authenticity of his mission by emphasizing God's very special care and love for the lowliest people in society: the poor.

The "poor" in Luke are not the working poor, but the destitute, the beggars of society, those who live in quiet desperation.

Consequently in Luke, Jesus opens a gate of hope for those who are without hope.

But being poor is not necessarily limited to a person's bank account--many people feel they have a poor education, a poor job, a poor emotional relationship with their spouse, with their parents, or with their children.

And Jesus points out that often our problem solving techniques are all wrong.

We may go to the Lord with our problems, but then are unwilling to give up our ways of thinking and acting that often are exactly what is keeping us in bondage to these concerns in the 1<sup>st</sup> place.

In changing the process, changing HOW we live on a daily basis is how we can achieve peace, freedom, and serenity.

Certainly troubles may come our way--sorrow or illness may afflict us.

Our prayers may not be answered exactly the way we want them to be answered--perhaps to our surprise, God does not always do what we tell him to do.

Jesus was sent to bring the good news, to set us free from ALL THAT OPPRESSES US—but only if we invite Him into our lives so that he can help us shoulder our real burdens.

This is truly good news to all who are in one way or another “poor,” captive, or downtrodden.

4. Unfortunately, Jesus’ message today got mixed reviews in the synagogue.

Even though the immediate reaction to Jesus’ reading from Isaiah is positive—as scripture says: “all spoke well of him and were amazed at his speech.”

But then doubts begin to arise among them: Is this not Joseph’s son?”—they didn’t like that this carpenter’s son was stepping beyond the boundary of the ascribed place of his birth.

In the Mediterranean world, a son took up the profession of his father; and so they begin to ask: why isn't Jesus working with his hands? Who does he think that he is?

Actually what really angered the people was the apparent compliment that Jesus paid to the gentiles.

This really irked the people of Nazareth who felt that all they had going for them was that they were God's chosen people--and consequently they believed that all others were despised by God.

And here was this young Jesus, whom they all knew, preaching as if the gentiles were also favored, were also loved by God.

5. We need to understand that Luke was interested in changing the process of how we live, how we think and how we act.

Some 60 years ago, this is exactly what the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council attempted to do. Before Vatican II, the Church was seen as a hierarchy and a sanctuary.

The essential meaning of Vatican II was to change our perceptions--that is HOW we think about God, about Jesus Christ, about other Christians, about the Jews and about the Church. The council pointed that the Church wasn't just about the hierarchy; rather, the Church is about all baptized Catholics. And the Church was not just about being a sanctuary, a place where people go in order to hide from the evils of the world.

Now we are challenged to see the Church as a PEOPLE and a SIGN.

The Holy Spirit is not confined to speak to us only through the pope & the bishops who then in turn communicate with the people in the pew.

Rather the Holy Spirit moves where it wills and this communication is a 2 way street.

The Spirit speaks to the pope, bishops & to all baptized; but then all groups must listen to one another in order to get the whole picture.

And finally, Vatican II reminded us that all the baptized are to be a SIGN, commissioned to do ministry, ministries that used to be assigned to the priests, brothers and sisters.

We are not to be a place where we hide from the problems of the world, but we are to a sign of Christ's presence in the world.

But each of us, whatever our vocation and place in the Church, must learn from Jesus to exercise our own vocation, with our own gifts and talents and insights. He told us that God was not just someone out there, but rather God is dwelling within us, within our mission.

We know that we have a genuine relationship with God when we can say—like in today's psalm—that God is someone who revives me, whom I can trust; that the presence of Christ in my life gives joy to my heart and light to my eyes.

It is said that we are to resemble the God we worship.

Our lives—to some extent—are to be the book that others will read in order to learn about God.

When people look at my life, what will be the lasting impression that they have of God?

Are we life-giving? Do we reflect God's peace and joy through our words, our actions, our values?

Will it be said of us that we are good news to the poor, that in our lives, we are known as people who set others free and brings light to dark situations and places?

In many ways, the hardest place to bear witness to God is in our daily lives, among people who know us, warts and all.

Jesus chose his home town synagogue of Nazareth to proclaim who he was.

Our witness, if it is to be effective, must start with the people of our own family, our friends, our co-workers, our fellow students, and our acquaintances.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME--Because God has anointed ME to bring glad tidings to the poor, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord!

And like Jesus, this challenge for us IS to fulfill the text today, to make it real and to live it out.

Let us try to be like Christ and bring joy and life to the people to whom we are sent.

May this mission be the lasting impression that we make upon the people around us...