

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 4 & 5, 2020

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### Christians Following Jesus: a Good Idea

Once a reporter, interviewing Mahatma Gandhi, asked: “Mr. Gandhi what do you think of Western civilization?”

Gandhi responded: “I think it would be a good idea!”

Jim Wallace, in his book *Christ in Crisis*, that was to be the source of our Parish Lenten & Easter reflection, noted that many folks today, of many faiths and/or of no religion, think that a good question right now might sound like this:

Reporter: “What do you think of Christians following Jesus?”

Response: “I think it would be a good idea!”

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Sisters and brothers, as we all know, we are living through a perilous and polarizing time in our Nation, with a dangerous crisis in moral/religious and political leadership at the highest levels of our government and of our Church. As we’ve been reflecting on the last several months: the soul of our Nation and the integrity of our Faith are now at stake.

It is my deep conviction – and I would guess the conviction of many of us – that Jesus and his teaching show us a way out of our present national and global dilemma...; but, by and large, the voice of Jesus and his leadership are missing-in-action in the public square. The powerful message of Jesus has been drowned out by many factors including by the New Christian Right – with assistance from Catholic billionaire Conservatives – who have sabotaged the message of Jesus. This mind-set proposes to ‘make America great again’ by advancing American exceptionalism, white nationalism, anti-immigrationism, anti-feminism, anti-LGBTQ-ism, anti-environmentalism, the hard ethic of free markets, ... with a peculiar revulsion to kneeling black football players. In this prosperity-promising theology of glory, the Jesus who delivered the Sermon on the Mount would be a moral hazard.

Sisters and brothers, a good question on which to reflect as we move toward what is perhaps the most crucial election in the modern era might be: “*How can the core message and values of Jesus once again find its voice in the public square?*” I think today’s Gospel can shed some light on this question

In a prayer of gratitude to the Father, Jesus says: “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth because while you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent you have revealed them to the infants.” What Jesus is saying here is much, much more than a cute remark about little children playing at the feet of the family in the living- room. Scripture scholars tell us that Jesus was describing two different groups of people in his community and in his society.

First: the “wise and intelligent” are the leaders, the supposed teachers-of-the-law, the high priests, the scribes; those holding the social and religious power over the people; those “who sit on Moses’ seat;” ...the ones who have taken over the key of knowledge. The folks who consider themselves the exclusive recipients of God’s revelation, ...the “experts” ... those “on top.”

The second group – described in Greek as “infants” – includes those considered “ignorant” by the powers-that-be; those considered incapable of following an appropriate path on their own: those who need guidance from the people in charge – “on top.” Who are these? Women, the poor and afflicted, ... the excluded, the sick, ... those called ‘sinners.’

Sisters and brothers, in a prayer – a statement that seems so innocent at first sight – Jesus is turning the normal way people think and act upside down: Jesus is challenging the credibility of the religious and social authorities of his time.

What Jesus is saying is that God does not necessarily reveal Godself to those on top — those folks whose egos have gotten so big that they lose touch with the truth. What Jesus is saying is that God often prefers to reveal Godself to those on the bottom, ... those considered despised and inferior by the powers-that-be.

Jesus is turning the “normal,” the “usual” way of looking at things, upside-down — no wonder he ended up on the cross!

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Sisters and brothers, what might this teaching of Jesus say to us as disciples of Jesus and citizens of America on this Fourth of July weekend?

It seems that with some wonderful exceptions, many on the top in our Church and in our Nation – just don't get it: that in fact the structures and systems that are holding up the *status quo* are mal-functioning. We're in a crisis of sort. What is Jesus saying? Do you want change? renewal? a birth of something new? the coming of the world God intends? Then look to the 'bottom' ... open your eyes to the voices of "the little ones" that are crying out:

"Black lives matter!"  
"I can't breathe!"

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Sisters and brothers, some will criticize these remarks as the Church getting into politics. This is not about politicizing our faith. Rather it's about bringing the wisdom, the insights, the truth, the "yes," the light of our faith to bear on our politics and politicians. *This isn't bringing politics into faith, but rather bringing Faith into politics to confront it, transform it and – as Jesus did in a temple just before his death in another Capitol City – to up-end the tables of religion and politics.*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it so well:

*"The Church must be reminded that it is not the master or servant of the State – but rather the conscience of the State."*

Amen