

14 Pentecost 2020

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy.

In July 2013, Pope Francis made the following comment:

“The culture of comfort...makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others...In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it's none of my business.” End quote (Comfort makes us indifferent to suffering of migrants, Catholic News Agency, 8 July 2013)

He made this statement 7 years ago, and if anything, it is even more true today. If you doubt it, look at the behaviors of those who refuse to wear a face mask during a pandemic.

Pulitzer Prize winning author Elie Wiesel spoke at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania, where he made this distinction between despair and indifference:

"Why are people indifferent? Don't people understand that indifference is probably the worst plague that exists in life? It is worse than despair. Despair is a beginning. Despair can inspire you to create great works of art, music, literature, philosophy, theology. Despair evokes compassion, but indifference is the end. There is nothing beyond ... What is education, what is life, what is friendship, what is love, what is beauty, what is joy if not our own impulse, our own pulsation, our own protest against an indifferent society, against an indifferent world that you now are called upon to conquer, not with violence, but with

words; not with cruelty, but with compassion; and surely not with hatred, but with a sense of exultation."

In 2005 he said: "I believe that a person who is indifferent to the suffering of others is complicit in the crime. And that I cannot allow, at least not for myself."

(Against Indifference: a conversation with Elie Wiesel, Reform Judaism, Winter 2005)

Our readings, this morning, do not allow for indifference. The Gospel **never** does. As Christians we are always called to action. Prayer is action. Meditation is action. Peaceful protest is action. Our worship is action. Love **demand**s action. Inaction can lead to indifference and indifference leads to death. Death of ideas and ambitions. Death of spirituality, and possibly, death of the body.

One can be overwhelmed to the point of inaction. Especially with everything happening right now. So many vital issues surrounding us almost to the point of being overwhelmed. But being overwhelmed is not the same as indifference. Indifference is a sin because it violates God's law of Love, of caring for our sisters and brothers, of compassion and empathy. It shuts off the life of Jesus living through us.

I know that none of us would equate ourselves with the apostle Paul and of course, we are not Paul. But he never hesitated to tell his own story. At times, he seemed a little pretentious but pretty much said what he believed to be true.

1 Cor. 15 "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God".

Romans 7:24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

1 Tim. 1:15-16 “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

He told his story and that story is important for all to hear. It is a dynamic story of action. The reading from Romans today is chocked full of action statements.

“Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; 13let us live honourably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

In our first reading, God gives Moses and Aaron specific instructions on searching for an unblemished one-year old lamb or goat. How and when to slaughter it; how and when to eat it, what to do with any leftovers; and how quickly they needed to do this. The importance of this was made evident to them in the outcome if they didn't follow the instructions. It is a story that we all know well.

Likewise, in Psalm 119:

“Sing to the Lord a new song; *

sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful.

2 Let Israel rejoice in his Maker; *

let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

3 Let them praise his Name in the dance; *

let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp”.

Not a lot of sitting still here. It is very difficult to dance and not move. Although people who have seen me dance said they weren't sure what I was doing.

Finally, in Matthew we read: 'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone.'

If that doesn't work; "take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses." And if still unsuccessful, "tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector."

The New Testament authors and Jesus spend a lot of time telling their stories and doing for others. In the telling of their stories, and by their examples, they are showing us things that are important for us to do. To wake up and smell the coffee, then serve it to others.

As I said, loving others as Jesus loves us demands action.

Sometimes the action may seem insignificant to others and even to ourselves, but the effects are dramatic.

"On December 7, 1988, a massive earthquake hit Soviet Armenia. In its aftermath there were many tales and pictures of horror coming out of that region. But there were also

remarkable stories of love and bravery. Among these were the heroic acts of Susanna Petroysan.

Susanna and her 4-year-old daughter survived the initial quake only to find themselves entombed in the remains of an apartment building. Trapped flat on her back in the pitch darkness, Susanna managed to make a small nest for her little girl to lie on out of pieces of clothing within her reach. Miraculously, her searching fingers encountered a jar of blackberry jam still intact. Over two days she fed the whole jar to her daughter, taking none for herself. But still they were trapped. No help came.

Numbed by the bitter cold, weak from lack of food and water, unable even to move, Susanna began to lose all hope for herself. Yet, her determination that her daughter would survive remained strong. Fading in and out of consciousness, Susanna was repeatedly roused by her daughter's plaintive cry, "Mommy, I'm so thirsty." Her child's need kept Susanna going.

Finally, Susanna recalled a survival story told by some Arctic explorers telling how they had slashed their hands and given their own blood to an injured member of their party dying of thirst. Reaching around in the darkness, Susanna found a shard of glass. She then cut her cold-numbed finger and gave the precious drops of liquid to her suffering daughter. It was an act she repeated again, and again, and again over the next few days, using her own blood to keep her daughter alive. She kept herself alive so that she could perform this act of love for her daughter and ensure her survival. On the eighth day of entombment, they were found and rescued. The daughter was fine. The mother - barely alive - had survived only

because of her love for her child (Max Lucado, Applause of Heaven [Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1990], 91-95).

Nobody could have faulted Susanna for giving up out of fatigue, out of pain, and even due to despair. But none can ever accuse her of being indifferent. Indifference would have led to her death and the death of her child.

Part of what concerns me, especially this year, is the level of apparent indifference to climate change, to immigration, to white privilege, to racial prejudice, social injustice, and, yes, even to the pandemic. Not that these issues would lead to the death of the indifferent person, although the pandemic could. But indifference has led to the deaths of many who **are** innocent.

George Bernard Shaw said this: “The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that's the essence of inhumanity”.

In my mind, indifference is the antithesis of love and our stories **must be those of love.**

Now I can tell all of your stories about Ted, but I am not Ted. I can tell stories about Sam, but only Sam can tell **his** story. I have heard stories about Bob, but only he can tell his story from **his** perspective. I know that some of you here this morning, and others watching on Facebook are thinking that no one wants to listen to your story. **Every single one of you has a story to tell.** Maybe our stories are not what we would have hoped they would be. I know I feel that way. Not one of our stories is insignificant. It is very important to tell those stories especially as they relate to our world today and to your ministries. How each of you live out your service to Jesus and to each other. Your story of why you are partaking of this service today. Why do you come when it may not be safe? Why do you take the time to

worship online from home? There's a story to share. I spoke with a man two days ago who said that he supposed that he was a Christian and his wife did attend the Methodist church here in town. However, he did not go because so many Christians were hypocrites. We may or may not agree with him, yet it is his story, and one we need to hear.

Jesus was always telling his story even to those who were indifferent towards him. We cannot control those who treat others with less dignity than they deserve. But we can have the courage to tell our stories even in the face of that indifference. We can and must love those individuals because we have been loved by Jesus first. My friends, discover your story and share it.

Amen