

Bishop's Reflection, February 20, 2020

Some people will think that I am crazy when I tell them that I speak with God and he talks back to me. "You must hear voices," they would argue. "How could God possibly be talking to you?" "But isn't that what prayer is, a dialogue with God? And doesn't God speak back to us through the Scriptures, His Holy Word living and active?"

Take this week's Gospel as an example, even when we might not dispute what he says. We equate justice with "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" or, in today's lingo, "The time must fit the crime". We cry "foul" whenever the sentence seems too lenient.

Then Jesus comes along and says, "but I say to you," as if he is God almighty, having the gumption to say: "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Mt 5: 39). And I say, "Really, are you serious?" "Turn the other cheek, give your cloak as well, go with them also the second mile, give to everyone who begs from you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." These aren't just minor changes; these require a whole new way of looking at things. They require a change of heart in me.

Now, as you know, many of these examples have a direct reference to the Romans, the occupying force that all the locals loved to hate. The ones who were allowed to compel a citizen to carry their supplies for one mile, but no further. His audience knew what Jesus was referring to when he said, "if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them also the second mile" (Mt. 5: 41). And all his listeners would have had the same response: "No Way!" with many of them adding one or more expletives between the "No" and "Way".

And if anyone else would have spoken these series of instructions we would have every right to dismiss them saying, "how dare he even suggest it" or "he has no idea how much I've suffered or endured". Even as Church, and today, especially as Church, we need to be very careful in how we approach this teaching, mindful of the pain that we have caused through the abuse of minors and the part we played in the residential school system.

We need to hear today's Gospel from the Lord, and not just simply as part of the Sermon on the Mount, but as his sermon from the cross on Mount Calvary. In

today's teaching, these mountains are no longer two, but one. He didn't just say it, he lived it. His death on the cross is both gift and invitation, "come, follow me."

It's not an easy teaching, even though we know he's right. Prayer becomes a dialogue with God, an active engagement with his Word. We might resist him for a while, holding off until we no longer can. God wants to win us over; there is a part of us that hopes he does. Healing may not come easy, there will be many tears along the way. Will there be a day that, "I will love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me?" I hope there is, despite the many roadblocks along the way.