

## Twenty Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time: People of Integrity

Today's first reading comes from the Prophet Habakkuk. Habakkuk lived around 650 years before the Lord. It was a time of violence. The Babylonians had conquered the Assyrians and were threatening or attacking the rest of the world, including the Kingdom of Judah. The Jews themselves were continually assaulting each other. Hatred and violence were seen as part of life, even accepted.

Habakkuk's society was not all that much different than ours, where violence and might are glorified and the weak are kept in their place. This is Respect Life Sunday. Although Roe vs Wade has been overturned as a federal law, many states still allow unique lives to be murdered before birth. Some Catholics who are adamantly opposed to abortion have no difficulty with capital punishment as though lowering ourselves to the level of the killer is acceptable. Do they seek justice or do they seek vengeance? The two are not the same. Violence is all around us. Our young people go to middle school, high school and college afraid that some of their classmates might turn on them. Fights are part of their lives and turf wars are fought not just with fists but with weapons. Our girls have to live with the reality that they must always be alert to the possibility of a sexual attack. That is horrible. Our boys also have to live with this reality.

Add to this the latest horrors that the media delights in shoving down our throats because, they claim I'm afraid correctly, that people really want to hear about and even see the gory details. Put it all together and People of God join Habakkuk and cry out, "How Long, O Lord, I cry out to you, 'Violence,' but you do not intervene." Destruction and violence are all before me. There is strife and clamorous discord.

Habakkuk's prayer is answered by the Lord. He is told to write this down, it is certainly going to happen, you can record it even before it takes place: "The rash one has no integrity, but the just one, because of his faith, shall live." What does that mean? Integrity is the strength of personality that allows someone to be wholesome, sincere, one with himself or herself, one with others, and one with God. The just one, because of his integrity and faith, lives with the Lord.

Prisoner 16670 knew this message and lived it. He was a Franciscan Father named Maximilian Kolbe. Fr. Kolbe was a brilliant journalist in the Catholic Church in Poland during the 1920's and 30's. At one point, his publication, *The Knight of the Immaculata*, ran 750,000 copies a month. He traveled to Asia and founded monasteries in Japan and India. He built a Marian Shrine in Nagasaki which, about six years later, would be one of the few structures to survive the atomic bomb. When he returned to Poland, he spoke out against the Nazis who had invaded his country and were rounding up the Jews. At one point his monastery housed 3,000 Polish refugees, two thirds of them Jews hiding from the Nazis. The Franciscans were arrested by the Nazis and Maximilian Kolbe was sent to the death camp of Auschwitz. There he was branded, tattooed actually, Prisoner 16670. Destruction and violence were all around him. But he kept his faith in God and lived as a man of faith. In July of 1941, a number

of prisoners escaped from the camp. The Nazi's lined up the other prisoners to carry out their policy of punishing those who remained for not alerting the guards. Ten prisoners were to be killed for every prisoner who escaped. Francis Gajowniczek, a married man with young children was one of those chosen for death. Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward and said, "Take me, instead." He was put into the starvation barracks. Three weeks later, still alive, on August 14, 1941, he was killed with an injection of carbonic acid. He was beatified by Pope St. Paul VI in 1971 and canonized by Pope St. John Paul II in 1982. St. Maximilian Kolbe knew violence. He experienced it. In the middle of violence, though, he remained a man of integrity, a man of peace. He lived his faith joining his patron, Francis of Assisi, in praying that he might be an instrument of the Lord's peace. And he has been justified, honored by God and man, by God in heaven and by man on earth.

How do we deal with the violence around us? We have been conditioned by a violent society to respond to violence with violence, even escalating the situation. So we rejoin a nasty word with a vicious word, we respond to a dirty deed with an even more horrible one. That is not the way of Christ. St. Maximilian Kolbe responded to violence with sacrificial love. The people in Auschwitz who survived the horrors, and who were present as Fr. Kolbe was dying, told the world of their experience of God in the middle of violence. They spoke about a man of peace, an instrument of peace, who was what he said he was, a man of God. They spoke about his integrity.

So what, then is it that we are called to do? We are called to have faith in God to set our world straight. We are told to have an active faith in God.

But we are weak. Our faith is weak. We know that God's solutions are infinitely better than ours, but we decide to take matters in our own hands. We need faith. We are like the man in the *Gospel of Mark* chapter 9. Jesus came upon a crowded noisy scene involving some of his disciples. At the center of the crowd there was a the man and his son. His son suffered from what we now realize was a form of epilepsy. Jesus asked, "What's going on?" The man explained his son's plight, how the boy would have what the people of his time were convinced were sudden demonic possessions. Actually, they were seizures. The boy would become rigid and foam from his mouth. Sometimes he would hurt himself, one time falling into a fire, another into water. Then the man said that he brought his son to Jesus' disciples but they were unable to do anything for him. The man then said to Jesus, "If you are able to help him, can you do something for him?" Jesus responded, "If I am able? All things can be done for the one who believes." Then the man said the words that all of us can call out, "I do believe, help those parts of me that do not believe." And Jesus cured the child.

In the middle of a violent world and recognizing our own weakness, we come together today to pray for faith and for the courage to live our faith. Violence is not more powerful than God. We have to put our trust in God. God can and will destroy whatever the violence is that is assaulting us. If we have faith, even as little as a mustard seed, we can and will move mountains or even say to the local mulberry tree,

"Be uprooted and thrown into the sea," and it will obey.

We call out to God today:

*"Give us, O Lord, the faith to be People of God, People of Sacrificial Love," and help us join you in the destruction of evil in our lives and in the world. May we be true to whom we are, disciples of your son, Jesus Christ. May we be people of integrity, one with ourselves, one with others and one with you, our God."*