

"A World Bent on Peace"
Homily of February 23, 2003
by Fr. Brian Joyce

Well, I'm giving the homily, but in many ways it's prepared by our young people and their discussions. For example, the other day, as they gathered in group, they were asked, do they feel like they live in a peaceful community today? And I think the answer and the consensus was, "Yes, we live in a peaceful community, unless we get home after curfew at night or something like that, then it's not quite as peaceful." And the second question was, do we live in a peaceful world? And their answer to that, immediately, was "No, it's not a peaceful world." And the next question was, why isn't it peaceful? What is it that makes it an unpeaceful world? We all know about the threat of war and the worries around that, but what is it that causes the lack of peace in our world? Is it about money? Or is it about oil? Or is it about terrorists and safety? What is it that takes peace out of our world so easily? And I think they came up with a very good answer.

The answer is fear. There's a great deal of fear going around. We're used to it, maybe too easily, after 9/11. Fear of what might happen in our own homeland. Even before that - fear of people different from us, fear of people of other cultures, fear of other nations. Fear, fear, fear. That's at the root of it all.

And they went on to discuss, what does the world look like if the world is bent on war? And that was easy to answer, because in many ways we live in a world that is bent on war. The United Nations reports there are 35 wars going on right now. Now, none of them are Third World Wars, worldwide wars, so we don't even hear about them. But there are 35 wars being waged right now on our planet. We have friends - sons and daughters of this congregation - who are older brothers and sisters, who are in Turkey, in Kuwait, in Saudi Arabia. We have demands and threats and build-up militarily and weapons of mass destruction. We know what a world bent on war looks like. We don't even have to imagine it.

What does a world bent on peace look like? There, unfortunately, we have to use our imaginations. What would a world bent on peace look like? Well, first of all, it would be a world where we would recognize our blessings. Where we say how fortunate we are, where we realize how gifted we are and how many are without gifts. First of all, it's a world where we recognize our blessings. Secondly, it would be a world where we recognize our common humanity with all the other sons and daughters and children of God, and we'd ask the question, how can we share with them? And, how can we care for them? How can we share with one another, and care for one another?

Our young people notice right away that we don't do that. One striking example to me

was, you know, our young people go on work came up to Yakima, down to Tijuana over the summer. You go down to Tijuana and you go right up to the border and there are groomed lawns and lovely homes. And you step over the border and there is dirt, dust, debris and desolation, almost inches apart. You get the impression somebody ain't sharing.

It reminds me of the story, I'm sure you've all heard it, about the man who is given a choice between Heaven and Hell, and he says, "Well, I want to look each place over. I've heard a lot, but I don't want to make a mistake about something like this." First, he's invited to go to Hell, and he sees a wonderful banquet room and wonderful food and everyone around a wonderful table, and he says, "This isn't bad," until he notices the utensils. The forks and the spoons are four feet long, and everyone sits looking at the food, starving to death. And that's Hell. So then they give him the view of Heaven. He walks in - same banquet room! Same food! Same courses - delightful! And he looks down at the utensils - they're four feet long. But the people in heaven have learned to feed one another - have learned to care and share. And I think a world bent on peace would be a world where we would all learn to care and to share, and care for one another takes away fear. In fact, the Bible says perfect love casts out fear, which is at the root of the terror and war in our world.

Interesting Gospel today - we have a paralyzed man. Now, if you go back to the culture and the time of Jesus, if someone was paralyzed first of all, their medicine wasn't up to date; and, secondly, they attributed any illness to sin. So they would look at that paralyzed man, much as the many other illnesses that Fr. Gerry talked about last week, as a source of contagion - do not touch. A source of sin - you might get cursed, too. And what happens is, friends are not afraid to reach out and touch him and carry him. And Jesus is not afraid to touch him and speak of the forgiveness of God, and he is healed. In each case, they were not afraid. And we have to more and more pray that we can become a world without fear, with hearts not locked in fear. I like that African American spiritual, "Ain't goin' to study war no more! Ain't goin' to study war no more! Ain't goin' to study war no more!" That's just a quote from the Bible - that's not an African American spiritual, that's the Bible. But that's the vision that we're called to.

So what is it that we want to hand on to our young people? I would say, three things. We want to hand on to our young people safety. And that's a struggle, but we want safety for them, and as a matter of fact for all children of the world. Safety.

The second thing we want to hand on to them is values. Do you know how you pass on values? I think you pass on values, whether as a parent or a teacher or whoever, by modeling the values and by discussing them. Modeling and dialogue. And what that means is that we have to be people of value and with our young people, we have to be teachers of value and learners from them. And they have to be learners from us and

teachers to us, also.

And, finally, besides safety and values, I would hope the third thing we need to pass on to tomorrow and to our youth and to the future is a world that is not yet blown apart, that is still filled with blessing and promise and hope. May we hand on safety, values, and a world that is intact. May the Lord help us to do that, and may we help one another. Amen.