

Peace Mass - Homily of March 30, 2003

by Gerry Murphy

To a disciple who was forever complaining about others, the Master said, "If it is peace you want, seek to change yourself, not other people. It is easier to protect your feet with slippers than to carpet the whole of the earth."

How are we, as a Christian people - a people of the light as Paul puts in his letter to the Ephesians, to respond to war, evil and violence in our world - especially when that evil and that violence is directed against us? Do we take our cue from government leaders, the press or from the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Well, let me just read for you an extract from a recent statement by the United States Catholic Bishops. This is taken from their letter: *Confronting a Culture of Violence*.

Increasingly, our society looks to violent measures to deal with some of our most difficult social problems - millions of abortions to address problem pregnancies, advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide to cope with the burdens of age and illness, and the increased reliance on the death penalty to deal with crime. . . Violence is not the solution. . . A society which destroys its children, abandons its old, and relies on vengeance fails fundamental moral tests. Violence is not the solution; It is the clearest sign of our failures. . . We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing.

This teaching from our American bishops is uncompromisingly based on the teaching, person and vision of Jesus Christ. So, let's just go back to basics for a moment and consider the teaching and example of Jesus.

Jesus lived in a world where the oppressive use of Roman imperial power was an everyday reality. How then did Jesus take the side of the oppressed? Well, he proposed a policy of non-violent resistance. He advised his followers to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile and to give their undergarment to the one who takes their outer garment. In saying this Jesus was not telling his followers to be wimps and to lie down and die under oppression. No, he was advocating active resistance, carried out in a non-violent manner. And the whole point of this approach is that it is a way of opposing evil without becoming evil in the process.

And how did Jesus respond to the evil, hatred and vengeance pitted against him as he hung dying on the cross? Somehow, from some deep, untouched place of love and healing energy within him, Jesus found the ability to forgive: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' This power of forgiveness was an energy far greater than the hatred directed at him. In that sense there was a transformation of

energy - good was returned for evil.

In his wonderful teachings on non-violence, Gandhi said: 'To punish and destroy the oppressor is merely to initiate a new cycle of violence and oppression. The only real liberation is that which *liberates both the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time.*' A truly compassionate heart is one that recognizes that the evil, sin, and violence which one sees in the world and in the other are deeply rooted in one's own heart. Only when you want to confess this and want to rely on the merciful God who can bring good out of evil are you in a position to receive forgiveness and also to give it to other men and women who threaten you with violence.

As a Christian people, we are called to share the fullness of spirit and hope that has been lavished on us, with others. Sharing the Spirit of the Body of Christ is about communion, reconciliation; it is not about making people pay. We kill the body of Christ every time we kill another human being.

Lord Jesus, make our hearts more like yours: strong, forgiving and truly compassionate. Inspire in us the will and resolve to counter violence, greed, and hatred in ourselves and in our world. Use us to overcome all that tears people apart, and help us to celebrate all that binds us as one human family equally loved and blessed by you. Amen.