

PASTORAL REFLECTION FOR THE 20TH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

August 13th-14th, 2022

I'm going to go out on a limb, and ask a question. Should Christians not have a "bias" about hunger? It is possible to be neutral about starvation? For that matter, is it possible – say-- to be neutral about lead pollution in public housing or lengthy detentions in overcrowded cages, a shutdown on convenient voting processes or reproductive health options? Ironically that reveals a different kind of "bias" that is uncomfortable to admit, that some people are more valuable than others. We have another "bias" grounded in a tendency to picture Jesus as a peace-loving soft spoken teacher with a sheen of light around his head bathing everyone in his gentle loving presence. That's not what we see in today's gospel.

For a little background on this text, it's good to call to mind the state of the world when Jesus was walking it. The vast majority of the Palestinian population – his people—were poor or working class – 70 percent. One in ten were in constant danger of starvation. Slavery of various sorts was rampant. And here comes Jesus, promising relief from all of this. But it wouldn't come easily. It would require setting fire to the earth, challenging systems in place. Jesus brings a refining fire that burns away social orders, habits and practices that create permanent unfairness. And yes, getting involved in this WILL cause divisions, even in some families. It pits a new vision against fossilized viewpoints, and family members will fall on different sides of the issues. If we were to study Luke's Gospel, we would find three things that he sees standing in the way of following Jesus into this radical vision: wealth, status, and fear. Luke is very specific about what it takes to "Go and do likewise," and we can see these obstacles in what our national leaders are struggling with these days in Washington, just to cite one example.

Joan Chittister has written in *THE TIME IS NOW*, that "the ideal of Christian life is personal goodness, of course, but our faith requires that we be more than pious, more than followers of the system, more than mere card-carrying members of the Christian community. It requires that we each be so much a prophetic presence that our corner of the world be a better place for our having been there." This will require that we be more than neutral. Perhaps it would be doable for us to just select one issue in our daily lives on which we would be willing to begin taking a stand . . .

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