

24th Sunday Ordinary Time, A  
10th Anniversary of Nine-Eleven

Good morning. It is a privilege and a pleasure to be with you on this absolutely beautiful morning. It was nice to see everyone so pleasant and welcoming as they came to Mass this morning. For those of you who don't know me, I'm the deacon over at your neighboring parish of St. Bridget. I'm also a chaplain over at Seattle Children's Hospital, and I've been in both places for 28 years now.

Fr. Oliver was kind enough to allow me to spend a few minutes with you today, both to reflect upon the scriptures and also to share with you something that has been going on for the last few years within some of your neighboring parishes. But before that, I know that we're very aware that today is the 10th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on our country. We remember today all the innocent victims of that attack: those who died when the towers collapsed, those who died at the Pentagon, and all the passengers in those four planes. And we remember also the selfless courage and heroism of so many people who risked their own lives trying to save others. Our hearts were united with them all then, as were the hearts of so many people around the world.

It is right for us to remember them! And it is important to ponder what our faith might have to say on this occasion, just as it is always valuable to reflect about what our faith has to say about the important issues of our times. However, that reflection might turn bittersweet. For just as we remember the victims and the heroes of that day, none of us can forget either that one short month after that attack, while our own country was still in mourning, our United States military forces invaded Afghanistan, and not long afterwards, Iraq. And today, ten years later, our military forces are still heavily involved in both countries.

Today's First Reading and Gospel almost seem to have been deliberately chosen for this day. From the book of Sirach we hear, "Wrath and anger are hateful things"; "The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance"; and "Hate not your neighbor." And then of course, in our gospel Jesus tells us a dramatic story about forgiveness, in order to demonstrate that we are to forgive others because we have been forgiven for so much. These scriptures are the voice of God speaking to us, and that voice in today's scriptures seems clear and strong! Do we ignore it? Do we qualify it and explain it away? Or do we hear it and heed it? And, if we really want to hear it and heed it, just how do we do that, especially when facing painful and complicated realities like terrorism and war?

It just happens that the anniversary of 9-11 coincides with these scriptures today; but other scriptures speak God's voice forcefully in ways that can be applied to many other issues in modern life. Over the centuries our Church has accumulated and developed a body of teaching based on the scriptures and our efforts to live them out. The body of teaching to which I refer is our Catholic Social Teaching, and the principles of social justice and peace. These teachings motivate us to respond to the needs of the sick and the aged, the poor and vulnerable, those who are in need or in trouble. These principles call

us to be a people who hunger and thirst for justice, and they call us to speak up for those lowly ones who have no voice.

But these matters can get ... sticky! Talking about a need for immigration reform, for instance, might get you into an argument. Saying that all people have a right to health care might immediately label you one way or another. To ask questions about the size of our military forces or our nuclear arsenal might get you branded as soft or unpatriotic. The same tensions arise if the subject is the federal budget and taxes, or the growing gap between the very wealthy and the very poor. And there are some questions so hot or personal that we don't feel safe talking about them at all – racism, for example. Justice can often be controversial, and it takes courage not to just go along with what everyone else thinks.

And yet, in all of these questions and more, our Catholic teachings DO have something very wise to say. Don't you think that people of good will really DO care about what our faith has to say about real issues in the world around us? ... and that they will then want to act on our faith in constructive, realistic ways, without a lot of rhetoric? I KNOW it is possible! But a major difficulty is that most of us know far too little about our own teachings and traditions on social justice and peace.

For me, three years ago I made a commitment with a few other people to be a part of a program called JustFaith. This program was started several years ago in a Catholic parish in Tennessee, and as it grew it found its way to the Seattle Archdiocese, about 6 or 7 years ago. JustFaith is a program designed to learn, discuss, experience, and pray about our Church's social teachings. Quite simply, I think it's the best parish program I have ever seen-- and I know that it's not possible for every person here to be a part of this program, but I wish it were! There are several parishes in the archdiocese who have sponsored this program – a few of them in Northeast Seattle. There are small groups starting later this month, one on Wednesday mornings right over at Mary House, on the other side of the school – and if there are parishioners who might consider accepting the invitation to explore this, there is more information in the back of church.

But I know most of you can't sign up for this, so I would ask you ALL to PRAY for justice and peace. And pray for the success of this effort. And one thing more ... I invite you, I urge you, to pay careful attention to our Church teachings on social justice and peace, especially over the next 14 months. The God who speaks to us today in Sirach has warned us about wrath, anger, and vengeance on the anniversary of 9-11. The Jesus Christ who speaks to us in today's gospel warns us to forgive others or else we ourselves might not find forgiveness. And I am certain that our God has a lot MORE to say to us, especially as our country considers so many social issues over the next 14 months, as we prepare for the next round of elections.

May God bless you all, and thank you for your kind attention this morning.

Deacon Denny Duffell  
Given at Assumption Parish, 9/11/11