



Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany(C)
February 24, 2019
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“And Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept upon them, and after that, his brothers talked with him.” (Gen 45:15)
+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Last week, I concluded my message with “If you are hurting or in pain of any kind, may the presence of God in this place begin a process of healing.” In our first reading, Joseph can be seen as the healing presence of God. Joseph was sold by his brothers and spent years in Egypt.

Today’s passage from Genesis provides us with a glimpse into the mind of God, a mind which loves at all costs, which bears no grudges, which does not judge and which longs for life for others. That longing for life for others includes those who do not love, who hold grudges, who judge harshly and who seek to tear down instead of buildup. How very difficult is that to accomplish!

My guess is that we all know people or have known people we might see as examples of either side of the same coin. One side of coin is life-giving and the other side of the coin is destructive. We live in a world that is seemingly more destructive of others than life-giving for others.

The words and actions of some people can call us to a deeper level of self-assessment and reflection. In other words, how do we want to live life and how do we want others to experience life through us? I believe these are critical questions and important measures for those who seek to live a self-examined life.

Do you, do we, really want to live a self-examined life or not? Do we want to be at peace within ourselves so that we can be peace makers in our community, in our work places, in our relationships and in this place we call St. Mark’s?

What would a self-examined life look and feel like? What did the interior life of Joseph look and feel like that he could forgive his brothers for the crime which they committed against him? What did the interior life of Jesus look and feel like that he could cast out any notion of retribution in favor of love at all costs? Love at all costs seems to have flowed from him, a love vastly counter-cultural then as it is now.

Today’s Gospel passage presents us with a considerable challenge. Individually and collectively, the Gospel presents us with a way of living. That way of living mirrors the compassion and love of Jesus. That way of living also mirrors the compassion and love of Joseph in Genesis. As Christians, how much do we want to experience our lives as lives of compassion and love, and how do we get there?

If you will, think for a moment about a time in your life in which compassion and love could have prevented a major disruption in your life as well as the life of another person. These days, disruptions in relationships can happen in the blink of an eye.

I worry about how easy it is to dash off an email without reflection, without re-examining its contents and without thinking about how it might be received and perceived by the recipient. I am guilty of that and perhaps you might be as well.

In the social media world of eMails, Facebook, Tweets, Instant Messenger, What's App, Instagram and other avenues of expression, how easy it is to express unbridled feelings without reflection. Ever stopped to think about that? Ever stop to think about the chaos of the world in which we live often fueled by unbridled feelings expressed without reflection?

When we express ourselves without reflection, without compassion and love in our hearts, we run the risk of damaging a relationship and can harm others in ways never intended. Like words once spoken and unable to be retrieved, so, too, are expressions sent via social media which cannot be retrieved. Once sent, they are 'out there' and can either build up or tear down. Once sent, they can be interpreted in all sorts of ways, some perhaps helpful and others perhaps not. Once sent, they can raise more questions than provide answers or solutions and can cause another to act in kind.

Perhaps, a question for us today might be "How do we learn to live a self-examined life, a life with the love of God in our hearts as the foundation of an interior life of compassion and love?" Over the centuries, mystics in many traditions have spoken about the interior life of the soul. As I try to wrap my mind around that concept, that non-tangible aspect of who we are as human beings, I struggle. I struggle with how best to feed my interior life of faith in such a way that the Gospel of Jesus is the bedrock from which life flows.

Week after week here at St. Mark's, we are offered formation for an interior life of faith. Here, we are afforded the potential to learn to live with more compassion, love and mercy. Here, we experience God in unique and wonderful ways.

At Baptism, we were sealed for Christ forever. Baptism committed us to an interior life which longs to be nourished and fed. The Word of God, the Eucharist of God and the people of God who gather in Christ's Name are hallmarks of nourishing and feeding the soul. When we embrace those hallmarks of faith and attempt to live as faithfully as possible, the soul is nourished and fed. We can be assured of a deeper experience of God within us. We can experience a kind of peace which can enable us to love even our enemies, to do good to those who persecute us, to bless those who speak ill of us and to pray for those who would harm us in any way.

The peace of God in Jesus can enable us to have hearts of forgiveness. Joseph forgave his brothers. Jesus forgave those who crucified him. Is there a need in your heart to forgive someone who in turn could experience a peace like never before? The peace of God can enable us to "Do unto others as we would have them do unto us", the Golden Rule, a profound guide for the Christian life.

May the peace of Christ which surpasses understanding keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God in Christ Jesus today and every day. Amen.