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SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER—YEAR C *What Would Jesus Do?*

Some time back, bracelets with the letters WWJD were quite popular. The letters, of course, stand for *What Would Jesus Do?*

That is actually much more than just a catchy phrase on a bracelet. There is a wealth of wisdom in asking ourselves that question in any difficult situation in life.

The readings today suggest what Jesus would have us do is keep his Word and live in His Spirit.

That question was actually facing the early church leaders as they struggled through their first crisis: what would gentiles have to do to become followers of Jesus? Would they need to be circumcised? They resorted to gathering together in council and praying to find the right answer. Their solution was made “with the Holy Spirit.” There was a sense that the Spirit of Jesus was guiding them, letting them know what Jesus would do, in charting a course into this unknown territory as the church was beginning to spread.

This passage from the Acts of the Apostles is the basis for the way the church throughout the ages has functioned – relying both on the lived word of God (Tradition) and the written Word of God (Scripture) Even some of our non-Catholic friends are beginning to see that Luther’s famous saying “Scripture alone,” is not found in Scripture. What is found there is what we see today – the church leaders gathering in prayer, guided by the Spirit, making decisions that eventually make up the Tradition of the church.

From the Gospel it is obvious Jesus wants us to walk in an intimate, loving relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are to pray to the Father, focus on His Word, and live in the Spirit. It is here we realize the revolutionary new vision of God Jesus offers us – an intimate, in-dwelling God whose Spirit guides, inspires and informs us from within.

The second part of this revelation is that we are to express our relationship with this loving God by loving one another. To keep the Word of Jesus is to keep the Great Commandment he gave us: love God with our whole being, but also and just as important, love one another as he has loved us, to the extent of loving even our ene-

mies as he did. That is expressed especially through forgiveness, which is the hallmark and lifeblood of the church.

In the end, we are being called to realize, to the extent that we can, the new heavenly Jerusalem of the second reading, in our lives here and now. This is called “realized eschatology,” the making present now what we will be experiencing when Jesus comes again.

The following possibly true short story captures the spirit of this ideal. Three men running to catch a subway train knock over the fruit stand of street vendor. Two of the men brush themselves off and keep on going. The other stops to help put up stand. It turns out that the vendor is blind boy, who finally asks the man who stopped, “Are you Jesus?”

The Eucharist is a miracle of the power of the Spirit; it makes present the love of God Jesus showed on the cross; it is an intimate meal in which God gives us himself to us, and transforms us into the Body of Christ, sent to love the whole world.

So, what would Jesus do? Even more important, what would Jesus have us do? He would have us keep his Word and live in His Spirit.

Archbishop Emeritus Sylvain Lavoie, OMI

LOVE, NOT EXCUSES, MOVES THINGS FORWARD

The excusable doesn't need to be excused and the inexcusable cannot be excused.

Michael Buckley wrote those words commenting on Peter's triple betrayal of Jesus. Here's the context. Peter had betrayed Jesus in his most needy hour, not out of malice, simply out of weakness. Now, facing Jesus for the first time since that betrayal, Peter is understandably uncomfortable. What do you say after betraying someone?

Well, he didn't need to say anything. Jesus took the initiative and, as Buckley highlights, he didn't excuse Peter. Jesus didn't say things like, it's perfectly understandable to be afraid in a situation like that! You weren't really yourself! I understand how that can happen! He didn't even tell Peter that he still loves him. None of that. He simply asked Peter, “Do you love me?” and when Peter said yes, everything moved forward. No excuses were needed. The excusable doesn't need to be excused and the inexcusable cannot be excused. Our humanity already explains why we are prone to betray; what needs to be spoken in its wake is a reaffirmation of love.

A couple I know had this happen in their marriage. They went to a party together one Friday night and the wife, partly through the influence of alcohol and drugs, left the party with another man. Her husband was unaware of this for a time but, upon finding out what had happened, was understandably very distraught. He went home alone and spent a sleepless night thinking, his thoughts moving through a series of vengeful fantasies to what (through grace) he eventually decided on.

He was sitting at the kitchen table midmorning the next day when his wife, sheepish and self-chastened, came home. She had her apologies rehearsed and was ready to face his justified anger and fury. She got something else. Her husband didn't let her voice any apologies or excuses, nor did he explode in anger. Rather, calm and sad, he simply said this to her: "I'm going to move out of the house for a week, so you can think this through. You need to decide. Are you my wife or are you someone else?" He came back a week later to her apologies, but more importantly to her renewed, more radical commitment to their relationship. Their marriage has been solid and grace-filled since. She is now committed to a marriage in a way she never quite was before.

No doubt upon his return, this man's wife did offer some tearful apologies and excuses. His refusal to let her voice them earlier may well have served a purpose long-term, but was admittedly somewhat cruel short-term. Even when something can't be excused, we still need the opportunity to say we are sorry. Apologies are important, both for the person offering them and for the one receiving them. Until an explicit apology is made, there is always unfinished business. However, explicit contrition is not ultimately what moves things forward when a relationship has been wounded or fractured. What moves things forward is a renewed commitment to love, to a deeper fidelity.

The inexcusable cannot be excused. Strictly speaking, that's true, though sometimes a deeper understanding of things somewhat excuses the inexcusable. Here's an example.

Several years ago, this incident occurred in Australia. A Catholic School Board had just finished building a new multi-million-dollar school. Not long after it's opening, one of its students, a boy in high school, started a fire in his locker, unaware that the gas valves for the school's heating system were right behind his locker. A huge fire started and the whole school burned down. To his credit, the boy summoned his courage and owned up to what had happened. Then, of course, a never-ending series of questions ensued: Why would he ever do that? Why would anyone start a fire in his locker? What accounts for that kind of reckless stupidity? What can excuse the inexcusable?

I very much appreciated an answer given to these questions by one of the Australian bishops. Speaking to a questioning group of teachers and school administrators, his short answer said it all. Why would this young student do something like that? Because he is a boy! Young boys have been (for no explicable reason) starting fires long before gas valves ever appeared on the planet. Moreover, there's no excuse for it, save human nature itself.

Often times, that's the excuse for the inexcusable: Because we're human! Indeed, this was the real excuse for the woman who under the influence of alcohol and drugs betrayed her husband, just as it was the real excuse for Peter when he betrayed Jesus.

But, this must be read correctly. This doesn't give us permission to appeal to our morally inept human nature as an excuse for betrayal or stupidity. We're human! Boys will be boys! The lesson rather is that whenever our moral ineptness has us fall into betrayal or stupidity, what ultimately moves things forward is not an apology or an excuse, but a renewed commitment in love

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

THE TOOLS TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY

The readings this Sunday give me such comfort. Comfort in knowing that there have always been disagreements in Christian communities and comfort in knowing that Jesus left us with the tools to work through them.

In the reading from Acts, we hear that there are different understandings about how to be faithful to God. The important thing is that it is about being faithful to God. If that is the starting point in our community, I believe we can accomplish the will of God. Yet, people are still divided about how to discern that will. And so, we have rules. Often this can be seen as a way to control, and I have struggled with this myself. However, a recent situation made it much more clear for me. At the beginning of Covid, we had strict rules about how to deal with symptoms and being a close contact. Everyone knew what was expected of them for the sake of the community. We may not have been happy with all the rules, but the expectations were clear. Now, we find ourselves in a very different situation. Should we test before we go to a function? What if we have been in close contact but have no symptoms. Is it just a head cold we have as we are testing negative? Is it ok to get on the plane to travel? We are now in position to discern for ourselves whether there will be implications. This is a moral dilemma. So, while we have less rules, we have less freedom in not knowing how the decisions we make may have an impact on the community. So, the rules help us to know how to live in community, without worrying about making the wrong decision.

However, at the same time, we must discern those rules as a group. Therefore, community is so important. Jesus made sure that we would have the Holy Spirit to help guide us. However, anyone of us could feel we are hearing from the Holy Spirit; community is how the group comes together to discern. Just like the Synodal process we are currently engaged in with the Catholic Church.

Jesus left us with the Holy Spirit to help us through these times. Jesus understands that it will be hard to live in the radical way which he has taught, and He knows there will be struggles. However, he does not abandon us. He leaves us peace, if only we can accept it. Jesus has given us everything we need to be happy in this life, yet we need to give ourselves over to His way to find it. He says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.....Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14.27) We only need to trust that Jesus has given us the tools we need to discern as a community, with the help of the Holy Spirit.



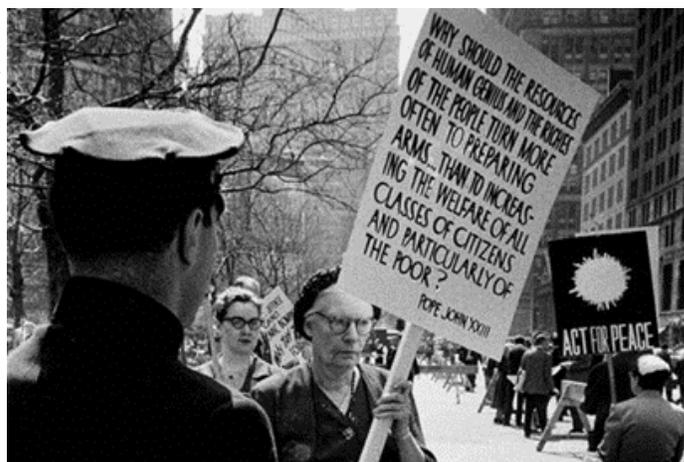
Serena Shaw, Oblate Associate, Vocation Team

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT: FORTITUDE

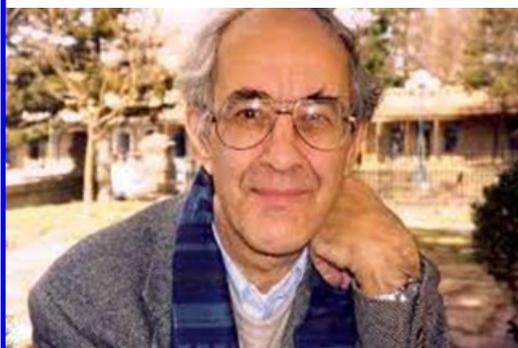
What is the gift of fortitude? Biblically, fortitude is the gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to us that we might have the courage to defend our communities, the poor, our faith, and the truths of God by which we live.

Rather than attempting to define fortitude abstractly, I would like to give a picture of it by looking at how we see it lived out in the actual lives of some prophetic persons.

Dorothy Day was a picture of fortitude. She called her autobiography *The Long Loneliness* and that describes what fortitude demanded of her. She kept to her principles, to non-violently serve God and the poor, even when this meant losing a relationship she had to a man she deeply loved, the father of her child; even when it meant risking the love and support of the very community who had joined her cause, as happened several times in her building of the Catholic Worker; and even when it meant arrest, ridicule, loss of her former friends and unspeakable loneliness. That is fortitude.



Henri Nouwen is another example of prophetic fortitude. He never wrote a formal autobiography with loneliness in its title, but, like Dorothy Day, he lived that loneliness. He was a man of tortured complexity, but also a man of real faith.



Nouwen believed in the reality of God, the unfathomable compassion of Jesus and the transformation this would bring into our lives if we ever gave ourselves over to it. He lived that and tried to share it with others, especially the poor – he left the academic world for them, used to re-write his books to try to make them simpler and openly shared his own brokenness with the whole world.

He did all this, even though it constantly brought him deep interior crisis and to the edges of emotional and physical breakdown. He was accused of neurosis, egoism, narcissism, ambition and of not having an unpublished thought, but he persevered and, like Kierkegaard, his early mentor, helped millions of people by sharing his own pain. That is prophetic courage, biblical fortitude.

Fortitude is always necessary, and we might all do well to pray with Ignatius of Loyola: “Passion of Christ, strengthen me!”

Ron Rolheiser, San Antonio, Texas

READINGS FOR SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

FIRST READING

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (15.1-2, 22-29)

Certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the Apostles and the elders.

Then the Apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole Church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, with the following letter:

“The brothers, both the Apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from what is strangled, and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

Thanks be to God.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Psalm 67)

Response: Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations. R.

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you. R.

The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him. R.

SECOND READING

A reading from the Revelation to John (Revelation 21.10-14, 22-23)

In the spirit the Angel carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal.

It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve Angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel; on the east there were three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Thanks be to God

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Alleluia.

Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him..

Alleluia.

GOSPEL READING

A reading from the Gospel according to John (14.23-29)

Jesus said to his disciples: "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

"I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

"You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe."

Sacred Heart Church of the First Peoples

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