

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (A)

June 27 & 28, 2020

Homily

In our gospel passage, our Lord tells his disciples that "whoever gives a cup of cold water to one of these lowly ones because he is a disciple will not want for his reward". In other words, **no act of kindness, no matter how small, will go unrewarded**. And in our first reading, we heard a very specific example of this when Elisha the prophet rewarded one woman's kindness with the promise of a newborn child.

However, sometimes an act of kindness may go unrewarded. As **Ghandi** once said:

- "It's the action, not the fruit of the action that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean that you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results may come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result at all".

One of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is exactly this: **kindness**. One of the documents of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, put it this way:

- "The laity, dedicated as they are to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called...so that...(the) fruits of the Spirit may be produced in them. For all (of) their works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. In the celebration of the Eucharist these may most fittingly be offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord. And so, worshiping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives."

It is our responsibility, as disciples of Christ ourselves, to see all others as potential disciples too, persons who may see Christ in our acts of kindness to them. And, in the true Spirit of one hand not knowing what the other does, these acts should be performed even when the recipients cannot reward us.

Perhaps the following might be some examples of such unrewarded acts of kindness:

- A woman in a red Honda, Christmas presents piled high in the back, drives up to the Bay Bridge toll booth in San Francisco. "I'm paying for myself, and for the six cars behind me," she says with a smile, handing over seven commuter tickets. One after another, the next six drivers arrive at the toll booth, dollars in hand, only to be told, "Some lady up ahead already paid your fare. Have a nice day."

In Paterson, New Jersey, a dozen people with pails and mops and tulip bulbs descend on a run-down house and clean it from top to bottom while the frail elderly owners look on, dazed and smiling.

In Chicago, a teenage boy is shoveling a driveway when the impulse strikes. Nobody's looking, he thinks, and shovels the neighbor's driveway too.

A woman in Boston writes "Merry Christmas!" to the tellers on the back of her checks. A man plants daffodils along the roadway, his shirt billowing in the breeze from passing cars.

In Seattle, a man appoints himself a one-man vigilante sanitation service and roams the concrete hills collecting litter in a supermarket cart.

In Atlanta, a man scrubs graffiti from a green park bench.

Even in our secular world, the value of kindness has been well recognized. All these people were responding to the challenge of a new phrase which they had heard **practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty**. It all started in California with a woman named Anne Herbert. It was in a Sausalito restaurant that Herbert jotted the phrase down on a paper placemat, after turning it around in her mind for days. "That's wonderful!" a man sitting nearby said, as he copied it carefully on his own placemat. "Here's the idea," Herbert says. "Anything you think there should be more of, do it randomly. Kindness can build on itself as much as violence can." Now the phrase is spreading, on bumper stickers, on walls, at the bottom of letters and business cards. And as it spreads, so does a vision of guerrilla goodness. It's positive anarchy, disorder, a sweet disturbance.

Just as our Lord noted in today's gospel, an act of kindness need not be something done on a grand scale, but something as little as a glass of cold water. All that is needed is some thoughtfulness, with a dash of understanding and compassion thrown in for good measure.

- The following story is told of a young girl who walked in on her mother in the kitchen one day..

"Mommy, what are you doing?" asked Susie.

"I'm making a casserole for Mrs. Smith next door," said her mother.

"Why?" asked Susie, who was only six years old.

"Because Mrs. Smith is very sad; she lost her daughter and she has a broken heart. We need to take care of her for a little while."

"Why, Mommy?"

"Well, you see, Susie, when someone is very, very sad, they have trouble doing the little things like making dinner or other chores. Because we're part of a community and Mrs. Smith is our neighbor, we need to do some things to help her. Mrs. Smith won't ever be able to talk with her daughter or hug her or do all those wonderful things that mommies and daughters do together. You are a very smart girl, Susie; maybe you'll think of some way to help take care of Mrs. Smith."

Susie thought seriously about this challenge and how she could do her part in caring for Mrs. Smith. A few minutes later, Susie knocked on Mrs. Smith's door. After a few moments, Mrs. Smith opened the door and said "Hi, Susie." Susie noticed that Mrs. Smith didn't seem to have that familiar musical quality about her voice that she usually had when she greeted someone. Mrs. Smith also looked as though she might have been crying because her eyes were watery and swollen.

"What can I do for you, Susie?" asked Mrs. Smith.

"My mommy says that you lost your daughter and you're very, very sad with a broken heart." Susie held her hand out shyly. In it was a Band-Aid.

"This is for your broken heart." Mrs. Smith gasped, knelt down and hugged Susie. Through her tears she said, "Thank you, darling girl, this will help a lot."

Mrs. Smith accepted Susie's act of kindness and took it one step further. She purchased a small key ring with a plexiglass picture frame--the ones designed to carry keys and proudly display a family portrait at the same time. Mrs. Smith placed Susie's Band-Aid in the frame to remind herself to heal a little every time she sees it. She wisely knows that healing takes time and support. It has become her symbol for healing, while not forgetting the joy and love she experienced with her own daughter.

It is said that you can't smile without cheering yourself up a little--likewise, you can't commit a random kindness without feeling as if your own troubles have been lightened if only because the world has become a slightly better place.

And you can't be a recipient without feeling a shock, a pleasant jolt. Susie's little act of kindness certainly helped her neighbor through her period of grief. And if you were one of those rush-hour drivers who found your bridge fare paid, who knows what you might have been inspired to do for someone else later? Perhaps wave someone on in the intersection? Smile at a tired clerk? Or something larger, greater? Like all revolutions, guerrilla goodness begins slowly, with a single act. Let it be yours.