

16 Sunday B

July 22, 2018

St. Patrick's

Theme: Healing the “mad” inside

Beginning last Sunday, and continuing for seven Sundays, the church is giving us the New Testament Letter to the Ephesians, in which St. Paul sets out the core of our faith. And we hear this proclamation today: **“For Christ Jesus is our peace, he who broke down the dividing wall of enmity.”**

We know all too well how **“dividing walls”** separate and deepen hostility. They symbolize the polarization within our nation and world; also, among diverse groups...and, yes, within the church itself.

“For Christ Jesus is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity...” Saint Paul teaches that all of us have **“become near by the blood of Christ.”** In the first decades of the early church there formed a bitter rivalry between those Christians who followed old-time Jewish practices and Gentiles who were becoming the new majority within the church. The two ethnic groups almost tore the church in half. Toward the end of the first century St. Paul sees healing—a healing that came *only* in the very blood of Jesus. You see, Jesus left behind few specific directives on how these disagreements were to be resolved by the feuding factions. He doesn't do so now, either.

Instead, Jesus shows us in the cross how we are to be toward one another. Shown mercy recklessly by our Savior, in gratitude we are to show similar mercy to all others—including ourselves.

In the very fine documentary out now about the creative children's television host, Fred Rogers, entitled “Won't You Be My Neighbor?” a little boy posed a question to him that touches upon all of us: “What do I do with the mad inside?”

What do *you* do with the mad inside?

This past Wednesday marked the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. Born of a royal family in a small village in South Africa, as a young man he joined in the

struggle against the system of apartheid, which held black persons down by a harsh segregation.

Arrested, Mandela spent twenty-seven years in prison—not only jailed but forced to do hard, harsh labor.

What did Mandela do with the mad inside—as it must have brewed deeply within his soul after all those years? In 1990, Nelson Mandela was freed—“his spirit intact as the de facto leader of the freedom struggle recognized even by his enemies” (1). He did not allow rage, hatred and revenge take him control. Four years later he was elected the first black president of South Africa.

President Mandela stressed reconciliation between the country’s racial groups, and he formed the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” to bring out past human rights abuses and bring about healing.

Nelson Mandela and his white government partner in negotiations, former president F.W. de Klerk, together were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

As Mandela once put it, “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin....If they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite” (2).

St. Patrick’s: with so much fractured by anger, harsh words, and divisions, we can “be taught to love” by our Savior, Jesus—he, as St. Paul teaches us today, **“who is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity...”** As Jesus has freely poured out such extravagant mercy upon us, out of gratitude we are called to show that same mercy to others—perhaps, even within our families, but also within the wider society.

We celebrate this Sunday that **“Christ Jesus is our peace.”** Truly experiencing him by grace, he can heal that “mad within us” and make us instruments of *his* peace.

(1) Robert Ellsberg, “Nelson Mandela,” in Give Us This Day—July 2018 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018), pg. 188.

(2) Ibid., quoting Nelson Mandela.

