

20C SML 2019
LK 12:49-53

Over and again, there is an absoluteness and lack of ambiguity in Jesus' words and actions. We could even speak in terms of a "ruthlessness" in His words. When someone who wanted to follow Our Blessed Lord asked first to be allowed to take leave of his family, Jesus said to him point blank, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." In his clarity and exclusivity, Our Blessed Lord was ruthless and many of His sayings testify to this. No soothing, no calming, no pacifying, no watering down, no milk and cookies; instead the black and white truth is spoken – truth about us and the situations in which we found ourselves.

To the woman caught in adultery, He got her out of more than just a jam, indeed, he saved her very life. But in the end, He didn't wink, wink at her, he didn't turn a blind eye, but rather He said to her, point blank, "Go, but from now on avoid this sin."

If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.

These sayings pierce the heart: better to be crippled and disfigured than to keep on sinning.

Is there anything harder and more ruthless than to be called by Jesus to discipleship, and to answer Him that first I must bury my father, perhaps recently dead, perhaps lying on his deathbed, perhaps old and ill, and be told, “Let the dead bury the dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” (LK9:60) Ruthless!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ call to discipleship is just as radical because it demands that we abandon not only evil deeds but every hurtful word directed at a brother or sister. “Whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.” (MT 5:22) That’s ruthless!

Jesus’ call to discipleship demands regarding someone else’s marriage and of course one’s own body as so holy that you cannot even look with desire at another’s spouse. “I say to you, whoever looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (MT 5:27) That’s ruthless!

Jesus’ call to discipleship demands that there be no twisting and manipulation of language but rather absolutely clarity. “Let your yes mean yes and your no mean no.” (MT 5:37) Ruthless!

Today’s gospel rings the loudest of Jesus’ ruthlessness:

Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on, a household

of five will be divided, three against two and two against three; a father will be divided against his son and his son against his father, a mother against her daughter and a daughter against her mother . . .

That's ruthless! And what our Lord has spoken two thousand years ago has hit very close to home in many families then and many families today.

"Dad, until you put down the bottle and get yourself some treatment, you are not welcome in my home" is the same tough message that came from the mouth of Our Blessed Lord two thousand years ago.

"Son, there is no way, in good conscience, that I can support you in your choice of a wife" is the same tough message that came from the mouth of Christ two thousand years ago.

I'd like to quote our Holy Father Benedict in a speech he gave to newly ordained bishops: "Boldly invite the people from every walk of life to an encounter with Christ and to render more solid the faith."

The Pope's phrase "render more solid the faith" should be every disciple's anthem for daily living. No one wants a squishy kind of faith, an "I'm OK, you're OK" kind of faith. No one wants

a milk and cookies Christianity. Spare me a Christianity that doesn't include the Cross. If Jesus carried the cross, then so will I. That becomes very clear from the ruthlessness of Our Blessed Lord's teaching.

In today's world there are far too many people with a lackluster attitude toward Catholicism, not only from the outside looking in, but from the inside as well. At the root of this lackluster attitude is what is called secularism. Secularism presents itself by imposing a world without reference to God, and it is invading every aspect of daily life and developing a mentality in which God is effectively absent, from human life and from our awareness. The most telling statistic is that 40% of people don't even ask themselves whether or not they will get to heaven. 40%!

And as a result, we witness secularism attacking: religious liberty, marriage, children, women, the unborn and the elderly. Forgotten are God's loving care and HIS perspective on the dignity of humanity.

But if faith is firm, if it is solid like the rock upon which Jesus established the Catholic Church, nothing can overcome it. And firm faith needs credible witnesses.

Credible witnesses are those who can be believed. Are you

a credible witness at work? Do your business ethics reflect a firm faith as preached by the ruthlessness of Christ, or is it squishy?

When I was on my leave of absence, the one to whom I directly reported at work was on the vestry at his Church, what we would call the Parish Council. Very nice guy. He knew my background and loved to talk to me about faith. One of my colleagues had worked long hours on a project and when it was presented to the higher ups by my faith filled friend, he took credit for all of the work. A blatant injustice. My superior knew it. My co-worker knew it. I knew it, but my superior didn't know that I knew it. And she's looking at me and I'm looking at her. So I decided to ask a series of questions, answers to which my co-worker would have off the top of her head and my superior would not, so it would be clear to the higher ups who did the all the work on the project.

Another common approach revolves around the idea of "One goal with many paths." The underlying intention here is that no one should be concerned with how someone else chooses to live and that we'll all eventually get to heaven. The idea is that we don't need a set path, road map, or religion to make that happen. Again, if you're a good person, you'll get to

heaven.

I had two conversations last week regarding religion. The woman was raised a Baptist but raised her children in the Methodist Church, her point being, that if we all worship the same God, what difference does religion make? I said the difference is I'd want to be sure I am worshipping and understanding God correctly and that the Catholic Church's teaching contains the truth as it was founded by Christ in 33 AD and handed on to the Apostles, whereas the Methodist Church was founded in the 1700s (1729) by the Wesley Brothers and handed on to God knows who? She asked me who were the Wesley Brothers and I said, as a Methodist you should know who the Wesleys are. Then she said, "Well, I was christened as a Baptist, and they were founded by St. John the Baptist," to which I said the Baptists were not founded by John the Baptist. Try John Smyth in the 1600s (1609).

My point is Catholicism is a firm faith and recognizes something very definitive: a faith based on the Creed of the Church, which offers a well-defined pathway for living. That pathway is often narrow, includes many challenges, and can be ruthless! But the challenges are not nearly as perilous as the morally relativistic offerings of today's secular society.

Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (MT 7:13-14)