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CHURCHES MATTER

# Connect!

Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, July 12, 2015

Gospel Relationships

## This Sunday's Scripture Readings

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/071215.cfm>

Amos 7:12-15

Ephesians 1:3-14

Mark 6:7-13



Every day we become aware of circumstances and issues that perk the interest of Christian consciousness. Whether they are issues surrounding human life, political agendas, morality, or our responsibility to the earth, we must realize that the Gospel has much more to do with how we live each day than influencing acts of piety and devotion. The Gospel is very much about organizing both our divine and human affairs and does require political sensitivity and awareness.

Just this past week, there was a plethora of things happening in our world that ought to have grabbed our interest. Three such examples are a story about a [Texas Immigration Center](#), doctors in Belgium granting a healthy twenty-four-year-old woman who is suffering from

depression [the right to die](#), and a group of up to fifty teenagers bent on destruction who [raced into a Walmart in Georgia](#). While each of these come from totally different venues and deal with very dissimilar circumstances, they all have a bearing on the mind of the Christian and the Gospel we hold to be true.

It is safe to say that many folks in our world today have lost their connection with their Creator. Whether due to doubt, neglect, worldly attraction, or an inability to find a meaningful path, understanding oneself as a child of God is crucial to plugging the vision of the Gospel into our daily lives. It is not just about having sensitivity for and mission to the poor or living just lives or being responsible to our environment or one another—it is about relationships! Who am I? I am a child of God. When those words are found on our lips profound implications calling for a change in priorities and actions will follow.

Paul knew this well when he instructed the Ephesians. God chose us “before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ.” Every single person who walks the face of this earth has been

*chosen* by God to share in a relationship of love and intimacy! This is an essential part of the good news to be shared! St. Mark tells us that Jesus summoned the Twelve and sent them out two by two. They went off preaching repentance and if they listened at all to what Jesus taught, they also spoke of a God of love, mercy, and forgiveness who hears their cries and wishes for them to live a different world, one characterized by love, justice, and peace.

An anonymous fourteenth-century English mystic who wrote [The Cloud of Unknowing](#) and greatly influenced the development of spirituality took great efforts in emphasizing the need for self-knowledge and understanding the intimate love relationship we have with God. When people are able to fall into and embrace the truth of who they are then the way they live and see life will automatically change. It is not about obeying rules and precepts or having one ideology win over another. It is about relationships.

Each of the contemporary examples cited at the beginning of this brief article has everything to do with relationships. Each in their own way has something to do with a relationship with God, a relationship with self, and a relationship with others. We can debate immigration laws until we turn blue and every philosophy most certainly has certain truths it wishes to advance, suggesting its own as the one to adopt. This is a worthy and necessary discussion. The Christian, however, must step back and ask a further question, one that secular society either does not think to ask or fears asking. Why has immigration become a problem in the first place? Building walls around a country, while attractive to some, is an irresponsible and immature response. Instead of further dividing ourselves from countries whose people are trying to find refuge within our borders maybe greater success can be had in establishing partnerships with the powers of those countries to discern ways of helping each other solve problems. Of course, this would mean that we must abandon our preoccupation of entering into relationships with other nations purely for reasons of self-advancement, security, or need. People coming to our borders are not just drug addicts and felons. They are fathers, mothers, and children who are afraid. What would it take for you to leave your home and family and venture elsewhere with little more than a few belongings? One would have to think that they would prefer staying in their own land if they felt they could! Our psalmist proclaims: "I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD—for he proclaims peace. Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land." Glory is meant to dwell, not fear. Peace is meant to reign, not strife.

Violence is increasing and violence for the sake of violence is most disturbing. The victims of senseless violence always hurt the most. The fact that people use others for their own selfish end is a problem throughout our world that raises its head in a variety of ways. Our young people are so lost. They are looking for something to make sense out of their lives and perhaps the wounds and emptiness they carry are causing them to act out in vengeance. Do they have hope? They need the message of the Gospel preached to them. But the message cannot be old and irrelevant. A word capable of causing change and transformation has to be able to ring true and connect! Someone speaking elegant English, using the fanciest and most proper of words, will face the wall of irrelevance if speaking to one more simple. Jesus called the Twelve to preach a simple Gospel to simple people using simple words. The effectiveness and power of those words were determined by the conviction and example the Twelve brought to them!

Depression is a scary disease. We know so little about the human mind and there is so much more to learn. Those facing fear, darkness, emptiness, and despair live without joy, hope, and a transforming sense of love. To be caught in this cycle is frightening and to believe that one is powerless over the pain is overwhelming. People in this place of desperation have a difficulty trusting in a God who loves them when what they see and know is so miserable. But with all that there is still to learn and treatments yet to explore, is choosing to end one's life the *only* option

or even one to consider? The global community has always treated mental illness with suspicion. Those struggling with this disease were treated like lepers and still are. Because we do not understand it, we cast it aside and label those struggling as bizarre or crazy. Perhaps the call here is for humanity to take greater responsibility and for those preaching the Gospel to not only tell but show people that they are loved.

There are no simple solutions to the very complex problems of the world and I do not pretend to even suggest that there are. But each of these examples noted above speak of the tremendous need that still exists within our world for people to hear the good news and for prophets. We need those creative, exciting, out-of-the-box type of folks who are willing to put it on the line and be a different voice. They need to translate the love of which Jesus spoke and died for into real words and real meaning. It requires letting go of anything that would prevent this work, this ministry, from being effective. And, it requires broad shoulders because rejection is sure to come. Amos trusted that God knows better than we do. Do we? Maybe God is calling you to have a prophetic voice if only by being a catalyst for communication in your community and initiating dialogue by how we can effectively spread the message of Jesus Christ, using contemporary words and actions, to those most in need of hearing it.

Rev. Mark Suslenko

## PRAYER

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Father of all,  
Creator and ruler of the universe,  
You entrusted your world to us as a gift.  
Help us to care for it and all people,  
that we may live in right relationship—  
    with You,  
    with ourselves,  
    with one another,  
    and with creation.

Christ our Lord,  
both divine and human,  
You lived among us and died for our sins.  
Help us to imitate your love for the human family  
by recognizing that we are all connected—  
    to our brothers and sisters around the world,  
    to those in poverty impacted by environmental devastation,  
    and to future generations.

Holy Spirit,  
giver of wisdom and love,  
You breathe life in us and guide us.  
Help us to live according to your vision,  
stirring to action the hearts of all—  
    individuals and families,  
    communities of faith,  
    and civil and political leaders.

Triune God, help us to hear the cry of those in poverty, and the cry of the earth, so that we may together care for our common home.

Amen.

—*Prayer To Care For Our Common Home*, © USCCB, based on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*.

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