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For Sunday, November 8, 2015

Embracing Life

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/110815.cfm>

1 Kings 17:10-16

Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44



violence, negativity, discord, discontent, and malice. Those things speak of a life not based on order but disorder.

Yet, so much around us today speaks to our disordered selves. There is so much unnecessary and extremely traumatic violence occurring way too often. Recently we witnessed [another act of road rage](#) that pulled at the heart strings of many across our country and perhaps even our world. This one was more poignant because it claimed the life of an innocent four-year-old girl. An innocent, four-year-old, happy, full of life girl simply driving home with her dad on her second day of preschool has her life cut short because of a mindless, aggressive, power-driven, rage-fueled driver hell bent on making a point! What is happening to people that is driving them to such extremes?

I would suspect that no longer motivated by false motivators like fear, punishment, fear of embarrassment, and with long-standing social mores now called into question or discarded, many no longer have possession of a center of self-knowledge from which to act. Impulse and passion all too often reign supreme. Richard Rohr aptly points out that "before conversion... we

After reading the story of creation in Genesis, what images come to mind? We hear of a God freely and intentionally choosing to create something out of nothing motivated by the pure power of love, of which he is the author. God pronounces all things good at the end of his creation and everything is ordered as it is intended with each creature and thing in its proper place. Everything has its place and everything has its purpose. Images of harmony, peace, happiness, contentment, and mutual love and acceptance immediately flood our senses. The First Letter of John in the New Testament tells us that God is love. We are ordered toward love, not

don't know who we are or what we are for." Many do not know who they are or what they are for because they have not experienced conversion. He also rightly states that their "small self cannot radically connect with Being because it's always defining itself in terms of comparing, competing, analyzing, critiquing, judging, labeling, and positioning."

Hence, there is a valuable lesson that can be learned from the poor widow in this week's Gospel. She has been converted. Her loss and suffering were allowed to teach her incredible lessons and they did not lead her down the road of negativity, despair, or frustration. She learned that life is much more than what someone "has" and all about what one has "become." Trust and faith in God are paramount over anything one can acquire, own, or become. Developing patience, which is rooted in suffering, is what will ultimately bring people happiness. For the widow, life is a precious gift. She has also learned that God is the One who provides this gracious gift of life.

Our first reading this week from the First Book of Kings underscores this same virtue of trust and demonstrates what happens when it is embraced. For this widow, "the jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, as the LORD had foretold through Elijah." "Praise the Lord, my soul," echoes our psalm refrain. It is God who gives sight to the blind, raises up those who are bowed down, who loves the just, and protects strangers! The author of Psalm 146 discovered the same mystery as did our two widows.

We have a choice whether to allow life to bring us to an embrace or engage us in battle. Granted, we are psychologically complicated. But in most cases, except perhaps with extreme mental illness, it's all about a choice. If we've chosen the path of game playing, proving our point, getting ahead, teaching someone a lesson, showing someone who's boss, and being defensive then we are engaging in battle. Sometimes, as in the case of our beginning story, this battle has an incredible outcome. In attempting to win, we lose.

Whether we like to admit it, we are all at the ground and foremost point of our being a "poor widow." This is what we are created to be, what we are meant to discover, and where love ultimately leads us. We resist this calling because we falsely believe that being a "poor widow" is perceived as a negative, evoking images of excessive want, need, or helplessness. Therefore, we pursue a stronger self-image to acquire, one that is seemingly more secure, powerful, dominant, and aggressive. It is a self, false though it may be, that can overpower, overcome, bully, and conquer. In attempting to secure something, we lose our truth.

Whereas there is nothing negative, weak, needy, or pathetic in either the widow from Kings or the widow from the Gospel. In fact, the opposite is true. Their ability to trust makes them strong! It gives them courage, centers them, provides confidence, brings contentment, gives example, and speaks of abundance! By their choices, these two widows balance the scales and bring order to disorder. They chose to embrace what life has given, graces and hardships, and learn from the lessons they teach. In short, they act out of love.

And this is where our perpetrator of road rage and aggression misses the point. He does not know how to love. To do so means that he would have embraced the journey his life has brought him on and refused to do battle. He has literally taken up arms and brought down a most innocent victim, all in service of his distorted need to prove a point. Where would the world be if throughout history it followed his example? It would be in total ruin and I would not be here writing this reflection and you would not be reading it. This I know for certain. It takes the example and courage of those who show us a better way to keep humanity on course, at least

as best they can. They show us that love is what really matters and a life of peace and justice the only one worth pursuing.

In the end, we are all destined for love but it takes an embrace of life and whatever it brings to discover it. Sadly, for many the battle continues. We can only hope and pray that by giving good example ourselves they can see the light. Only then will we find our path back to God.

Rev. Mark S. Suslenko

PRAYER

God, teach me to be patient, teach me to go slow—
Teach me how to wait on You when my way I do not know.

Teach me sweet forbearance when things do not go right
So I remain unruffled when others grow uptight.

Teach me how to quiet my racing, rising heart
So I might hear the answer You are trying to impart.

Teach me to let go, dear God, and pray undisturbed until
My heart is filled with inner peace and I learn to know Your Will.
Amen.

—Helen Steiner Rice

NOTICES

CATHOLIC CAMPAIGN FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development the weekend of November 22, 2015. You'll find resources for promoting this collection at: <http://usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development/collection/collection-resources.cfm>.

CATHOLICTECHTALK.COM

CatholicTechTalk.com is an online community for Catholics passionate about technology and social media. This includes priests, laity, bloggers, writers, technologists, website developers, graphic designers, and all who wish to use technology more effectively in their ministry and personal life. The blog is a group effort by Catholic technology enthusiasts working to fulfill its mission to “make the name of Jesus Christ known and loved” through the use of technology and social media.

CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES

While the impact of Hurricane Patricia on the western coast of Mexico appears to be far less damaging than feared, Catholic Relief Services is still on the ground to provide emergency assistance; read more about its response to Hurricane Patricia here: <http://www.crs.org/media-center/hurricane-patricia-crs-response>.

And be sure to sign up to receive CRS' weekly *You Did It for Me* email, offering weekly bulletin stories and photos to share the good news of the Church helping those in need across America and around the world: <http://www.crs.org/get-involved/learn/you-did-it-for-me>.

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