

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 23rd, 2018

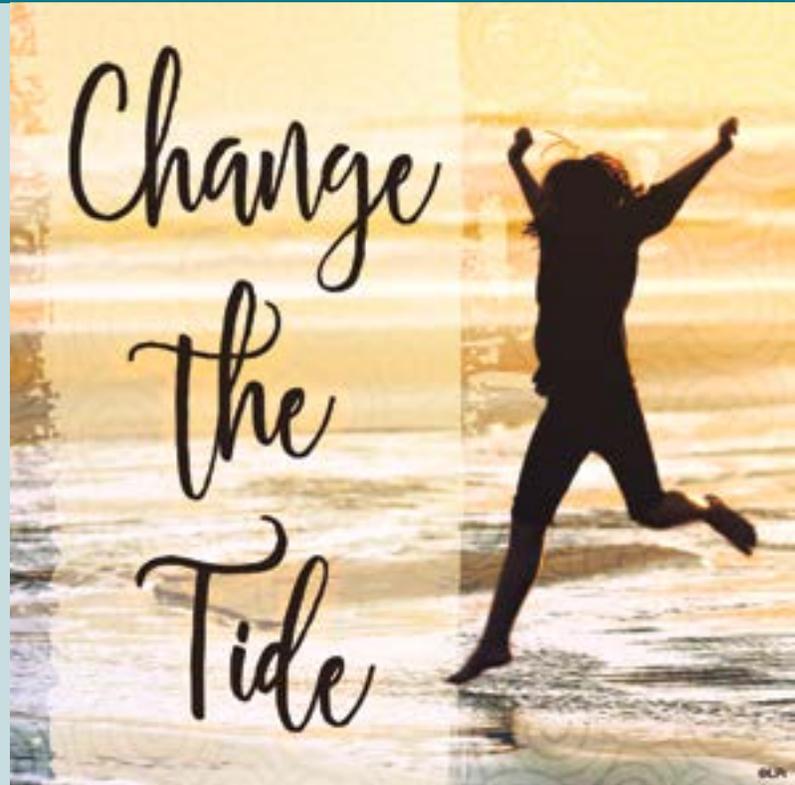
Jealousy & Selfish Ambition: Roots of Evil

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

Wisdom 2:12, 17-20

James 3:16—4:3

Mark 9:30-37



“Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from?” James asks this timeless question in this weekend’s second reading. There is an intimate link among selfish ambition, jealousy, passion, and war. Contemporary psychological science even confirms this connection. Yet, we still justify violence and war and see it as a viable means to solving conflicts and problems. Has it ever really accomplished what we hoped it would?

Violence is ugly and awful. War is ugly and awful. These are facts. Pope Francis even goes so far to say that “war is the suicide of humanity because it kills the heart and kills love.” Even St. Pope John Paul II stated emphatically that “war should belong to the tragic past, to history: it should find no place on humanity’s agenda for the future.” In a powerful letter to U.S. President George H. W. Bush and Saddam Hussein in January 1991, Mother Teresa of Calcutta wrote: “It is not for us to destroy what God has given us. Please, please let your mind and your will become the mind and the will of God. You have the power to bring war into the world or to build peace. Please choose the way of peace.” We are often so pretentious and self-focused that we even ask God to defend us in battle and bless our wars! Do we realize how contrary this thinking is to the Gospel we are called to preach?

We are nonviolent. We have such a hard time with this. We are nonviolent not just because we despise the ugliness of it but because we are asked to love like Jesus. There are no conditions on Jesus’s love. Compassion and mercy are not earned credits deserved only by the worthy few but unconditional always and everywhere virtues we are charged to embody. This applies even when someone is trying to hurt us. As much as we know how Jesus wants us to respond, our immediate reaction is often one of defensiveness or retaliation. While it satisfies our immediate impulse and desire, it ultimately leads to further chaos. James directs us here as well. He clearly states that disorder and every foul practice are the result of jealousy and selfish ambition. Our world is full of jealousy and selfish ambition (and a good measure of unbridled passion) and abounds with disorder and every foul practice in abundance. The Christian is called to change the tide and live differently.

One does not have to take up actual arms to be violent and wage war. We can do violence by our words and often by standing behind the facade of some self-righteous conviction we feel we are resolved to defend. Self-righteousness is simply another form of selfish ambition that

is often hidden under the guise of religion. It is strange that we are still arguing about who is the greatest even after all these years of listening to Jesus tell us it is not important. The answer lies in the playfulness and innocence of a child! The right and the left, the progressives and the liberals, the haves and the have-nots, the mines and the yours. Even with all that is before us, we still think that we are going to win the ping-pong match of truth when one or the other side admits defeat. Children crave love and live to return it. There is something profound here that we are missing both in secular and religious life. Dialogue, consensus, and discernment are the true ingredients of successful conflict resolution.

Meanwhile, we continue to pay lip service to the unconditional call for compassion and mercy, give a wink to the vision outlined in the Beatitudes, and save being peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy, and cultivating good fruits to times when it is convenient. When you live your life pursuing these virtues, it no longer matters who is in and who is out or who is right or who is wrong. Jesus never cared about this stuff. What upset him was injustice and seeing people being neglected and hurt. Developing a clean and humble heart and putting our relationships in proper order are paramount. Taking responsibility for our actions both past and present is the key to healing and renewal. There is no system in need of defense when we realize who we really are and what we are called to do.

We need to replace our jealousies, unbridled passions, and selfish ambition with a pursuit of love, justice, and peace. We have stumbled over the other way for centuries. Where has the way we have been doing business really gotten us? Perhaps it is time to really turn to the One who upholds our life and to live the way our Creator envisions.

Rev. Mark Suslenko

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PRAYER

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

— [Prayer of St. Francis](#)