

Year A, February 12, 2017
6 Epiphany
Christ Church, Mexia

Holy email: One day God was looking down at earth and saw all the rascally behavior that was going on. So, he called His angels together and sent one to earth for a time to check it out. When the angel returned, he told God, 'Yes, it is bad on earth; 95% are misbehaving and only 5% are not.' God thought for a moment – that was not good news, so God decided to send another angel in order to get a second opinion. When that angel returned, she went to God and confirmed what the other angel had told him. God was not pleased. So, He decided to email the 5% who were good, because He wanted to thank them and to encourage them to continue. Do you know what the email said? ... OK, I was just wondering, because I didn't get one either.

In his book, *When the Saints Come Storming In*, the Rev. Leslie Flynn includes the following: "A story is told of two unmarried sisters who had so bitter a ruckus they stopped speaking to each other. Unable or unwilling to separate, the pair lived in a large single room with two beds. A chalk line divided the sleeping area into two halves, separating doorway and fireplace, so that each could come and go and get her own meals without trespassing her sister's domain. In the black of night each could hear the breathing of the foe. For years, they coexisted in spiteful silence. Neither was willing to take the first step to reconciliation."

There are, of course, many things we can take away from today's Gospel reading, but I want to focus on reconciliation today, which to me is the *sine qua non*, the essential ingredient of the entire New Testament, and the mission of The Church. In Matthew, we just heard Jesus say: "So when you are leaving your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first to be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come offer your gift." That I think establishes a clear priority. And the other parts of the scripture today also concern relationship and making it right.

Henri Nouwen (*In the Name of Jesus*) tells us that the original meaning of the word "theology" was "union with God in prayer." Union with God, being reconciled to God, is therefore the first priority. And that means to love God, because God loves us and wants that

relationship with us. And we need that love in order to truly love each other. We need to feel and understand the unconditional love that God has for us, if we are going to be successful in human relationships. We have to hold on to the fact that Jesus emptied Himself of divine power and became as we are. Power and domination are the antitheses of love. God doesn't dominate us, control us – though God surely must have the power to do so.

Henri also points out that in the long, painful history of the church, we as people are tempted “to choose power over love, control over the cross...” We tend to rationalize that having power is justified - if we use it for good. But it is this very rationalization that launched the Crusades, organized the Inquisition, and enslaved people such as Native Americans and Africans. Though Christians consider themselves followers of the poor and powerless Jesus, power ironically seems to be an easier choice than love. As Henri puts it, “It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life.”

“... when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:5) It has been our temptation from the beginning. And Jesus was tempted to choose power in the wilderness, but He resisted it. He chose to follow the difficult, at times the seemingly impossible, path of love – all the way to the cross. It's not an easy choice! But if we are going to be reconciled, if we are going to help others to be reconciled to God and each other, we have got to find a way to exercise forgiveness and thereby be able to love unconditionally – in the way we are loved.

And the good news is that the Episcopal Church is one of the best places in the world to find this. The late Anglican Bishop A. T. Robinson “defined the practice of Holy Communion as simply ‘making holy that which is common.’ As Charlie Cook describes it: “we offer to God the totality of our lives – the darkness and the light – and it is blessed, made holy, and returned to us as the presence of the living Christ. (Right There!) We symbolize this in the gifts of bread and wine. Thus, it is Christ working in us and through us that eventually makes reconciliation possible.” What, we acting alone, are unable to accomplish, is now a possibility. This is what we have to remember every time we go to that rail – every time!

“Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, used to say to her fellow workers, particularly in difficult and stressful times: ‘If each of us could just remember that we are *all* created in the image

of God, then we would naturally want to love more.' Think about it!
How true is that?

At the holy altar, standing shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand, we remember once again that in God's realm there are no outsiders." Now as humans we will almost inevitably fall short at times. That's why we need to keep coming back here, and remembering why we are here. And we have got to find ways to bring others to the table, whether here or someplace else. That is the work of the kingdom. Go and be reconciled.

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.