

**Preaching by S. Mary Mark Schoenstein at Reconciliation Service
24th General Chapter, July 17, 2010**

“Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” Luke 4:19

We have heard many poignant voices today of those struggling in our suffering world. Perhaps some of us have been hearing the pain of these voices for some time now and have anguished as to how to respond. And here we are gathered in General Chapter striving to listen deeply, and longing to bring all we have and are to find a way to respond. How do we reconcile the call of these many voices with who we are and what we can do in response?

Henri Nouwen once wrote: “Life can become an unbearable burden whenever we lose touch with the presence of a Loving Savior and see only hunger to be alleviated, injustice to be addressed, violence to be overcome, wars to be stopped, and loneliness to be removed. All these are critical issues that we must try to solve. But when our concern no longer flows from our personal encounter with the living Christ, we can feel only an overwhelmingly oppressive weight.”

Jesus himself must have heard many of these same voices when he came among us over two thousand years ago, and his response to all of them was PEACE ... not just the peace he as a man could offer ... but the peace he knew his God alone could give. Peace in the face of injustice, peace in the face of poverty and suffering, peace in the face of ridicule, peace in the face of isolation and rejection, peace in the face of cruelty. Jesus reveals to us that since he was so totally focused on his Father, none of these things could rob him of his interior peace. And in his Father's spirit he willed only peace to all those around him --- all of them --- brethren, friends, the curious and yes, even his enemies. With all of them his presumption was to be at peace with them. His expectation was always to find a way to peace, since there was never a thought of violence in his heart.

Violence is such a destructive thing --- and it can be so subtle. The violence we all carry within us and impose on others: the disdainful attitude, the judgmental label, the long-held grudge, the distrusting approach, the sharp-tongued reprisal, the self-serving distortion of facts, the arrogant disregard for the gift of creation all forms of violence we all carry in our hearts, even if, by God's grace, they never see the light of day. It is in our hearts that we lack peace, where we nurture violence. How can we presume to say we stand for justice and will work for peace and for a better world when we carry such violence within ourselves?

Who are the sisters, the family members, the other persons in our lives whom we disdain? Why? Who are the ones we judge undeserving of our time, energy or

efforts? Who are the ones with whom we will not speak or even be seen? Only God can change these dispositions of our hearts to peace. Only if we are truly centered on God can we let go of these destructive attitudes and in humility let God show us a different view of our reality.

I have become deeply convinced that the voices of our day and age are calling each of us to a radical conversion of mind and heart. And this conversion can only come about by turning fully and consistently to the Lord of all Life, all goodness, all Truth. In the intimacy of prayer, God is revealed to us as the One who loves all the members of the human family just as personally and uniquely as God loves us. Therefore, a growing intimacy with God deepens our sense of responsibility for others. It evokes in us an always increasing desire to bring the whole world with all its suffering and pains to the fire of this Love. It is this unconditional and unreserved love for God that leads to the care of our neighbor, not as an activity which distracts us from God but as an expression of our love for God who is revealed to us as the God of all people. It is in God that we find our neighbors and discover our responsibility to them. We might even say that only in God does our neighbor become a neighbor rather than an infringement upon our autonomy, and that only in and through God does service then become possible. Only then will we be able to recognize the pain in others lives and the part we play in it. Only then will we be able to embrace the radical changes needed in our own life-style in order to bring relief to our suffering brothers and sisters. In his letter to the Romans Paul says: "As far as possible be at peace with all people." In contemporary words: Do them no wrong, no violence.

Our newly-appointed Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles repeatedly stated, in recent interviews, that his mode of operation, the deepest desire of his heart, is to listen to the people and to learn from the people. Such a respectful attitude could only come from a faith in the dignity of each individual, fired and honed in faithful attention to the words and actions of Jesus.

Our own Mother Pia pleads in one of her letters: "Sisters, love one another."

Let us pray that our approach to each other and to the situations crying out for our attention may always be from this perspective of faith, knowing of a certainty, that we have a loving Savior whose love alone, once we open our hearts to it, can bring healing to us individually, to us as a Congregation, and more importantly, to our human family as a whole. Any efforts or responses apart from this will be fruitless.

Lord, show us YOUR way!