

**Preaching for the 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
September 20, 2009**

Readings: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20  
James 3: 16-4:3  
Mark 9:30-37

This week we were visited at our motherhouse by a delegation from Santa Maria del Camino parish in Guatemala City, the sister parish to our own St. Joseph's in Mission San Jose. The three women and one man were here to share faith and their stories with the parishioners. We were privileged to host them for a meal and that was my opportunity to interact with them. It was fascinating hearing about their experience, especially since we have just started a mission in their country, but out in the mountainous area north of the City in Alta Verapaz. What the delegation shared was their attempts to live a Christian life in the midst of gang violence and a serious economic plight where people live in huts with no electricity or running water. However, they did not linger on their problems, but rather shared how their faith sustains them, how they try to reach out to the youth to give them an alternative to the gangs, and how they are helping their relatives in the US make ends meet, so they can continue to live here and send money home when things get better. I was so impressed with them!

As the gentleman in the group spoke of the situation, he quoted an often-used statement in the Church, "There is no peace without justice." People need dignity and a chance at a livelihood and fair treatment before the law, if there is to be harmony in society. Injustice gives birth to violence, and violence begets more violence—retaliation and an escalation of the level of violence, even to the point of war. This is what the people in Guatemala and many other countries are living with. The 1990's movie *Fargo* is an example of this phenomenon in our own country. The police chief was a Christ figure in it, one who could rise above the fray and stick to

her principles. It is also surprising that this reality doesn't lead to despair, and it is a sign of God's grace that there are individuals trying to make a difference for their own families and others by adhering to what is just, decent, respectful of human life.

The readings for his Sunday also speak of what happens when jealousy, rivalry, selfish ambition get the best of us. The Just One is subject to revilement and torture, wars result from uncontrolled passions that do not achieve the happiness that eludes those who choose violence. In the gospel Jesus is sharing intimately with his disciples about his impending death, and we are told they did not understand what he was saying. What do they discuss instead? Who was the greatest! They bicker over status and miss Jesus' message about a higher calling, so he talks to them about becoming servants, being humble, and places a child in their midst. He tenderly puts his arms around the little one and says to them, "Whoever receives a child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives the One who sent me."

Disciples are called to see the world through the eyes of Jesus, so what did he mean by this last statement? In his world view, the last are the first and the first are the last. Children can become invisible, even ignored when people are struggling to survive, as in Guatemala, or when people are filled with their own self-importance. We are invited to seek out the disenfranchised, the undervalued people around us and consider them and their needs in how we make our choices. This is a great challenge in a society that at its worst practices survival of the fittest and being number one at all cost, or looking out for "number one." This explains some of the causes for our economic situation and some reactions to how to fix it. It is also true that we are capable of incredible greatness and selflessness as a society—may these virtues more frequently triumph!

It is difficult on a daily basis to be so humble, to be the servant of all, but this either leads to or results from being a peaceful, peace-filled person. Standing up for what is just, putting others legitimate needs first is the foundation of happiness. “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace,” says the letter of James. The people in Guatemala with whom I spoke had very little in material goods, but they were rich in faith and exuded a peacefulness that comes from trusting that God will take care of them, if they live for others. They know the fruit of righteousness—may this be true for each of us.