

February 18, 2007--Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

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1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23; Ps. 103:1-13; 1 Cor 15:45-49 Luke 6:27-38

Reflection by *Sister Noreen Coleman, OP*

*"To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...
pray for those who mistreat you." (Lk.6:27)*

*"Forgiveness will not be possible until compassion is born in our heart."
(Thich Nhat Hanh, Interview, Sojourners, Feb. 2007)*

One of the greatest privileges I have in ministering to incarcerated women is to witness, in them, the true meaning of discipleship. Recently, Cynthia, sheepish and tearful, shared from her heart: "It's taken me ten years, but I finally wrote and told her that I forgive her. I pray for her and at last I am at peace." She was speaking of the woman who, a decade ago, was responsible for the brutal killing of Cynthia's two and a half-year old child. Cynthia's "I pray for her" speaks volumes about compassion.

And aren't we all inspired by the immediate compassionate response of the Amish community to the senseless murder last October of four of their young girls: "We really need to go over to the Roberts family and make sure they know we are forgiving them." For the Amish, the killer's wife and children were victims just as much as they themselves.

Wasn't it compassion that compelled the first Christian martyr Stephen to beg God not to "hold this sin against them," his infuriated, irrational crowd of attackers. (*Acts 7:60*)

For Cynthia, for the Amish, for Stephen-- for us-- forgiveness was and is simply a built-in part of the practice of being a disciple of Jesus. We know well his dying words, "Father, forgive them..." Why? Because I have looked into their hearts and they don't realize what they are doing. This is the legacy Jesus was giving us from the cross.

Last Sunday we heard Jesus lay out a few countercultural principles by which we need to live if we hope to be one with him. In today's passage he seems anxious to add another of his "beatitudes": "Blessed are you if you are compassionate, for compassion will be yours." This is how Jesus expects us to "do unto others"-- to listen deeply, to open the heart of the other and thus eventually to bring about the other's transformation.

Where does this compassion--this "suffering with" others--come from? To whom is this special gift given? "To you who hear," Jesus answers. To you who are willing to listen, to accept this difficult truth and to put into action the promptings of my Spirit. We cannot love our enemies by our own strength, but we can through the power of the Spirit.

May we one day experience with great joy the fulfillment of Jesus' promise: "...forgive and you will be forgiven. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap..." (*Lk 6:36-37, Jerusalem Bible translation*)