

Reflection for the 5th Sunday of Lent 2016

We have almost completed our Lenten journey. If you have been following along with Development and Peace, you will recall that we were invited to undertake a Lenten pilgrimage this year based on Laudato Si and the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

I don't know about you but I am confused about mercy. I can't quite wrap my head around it. I wonder if it's because only the heart and not the head can fully grasp mercy.

At a meeting I was at the other day, someone said that mercy is not a word that we use or even hear in every day conversation. As a life-long Catholic, I grew up hearing that God will be merciful to me. But I never use the word myself and am still not so sure how or even when to show mercy. I guess that is one of the reasons why I am on a Lenten pilgrimage.

Fortunately, today's Gospel is **very** instructive. The Pharisees were just itching to see what Jesus would say given the conundrum they presented to him about the woman. Instead, Jesus gave us yet another example of his third way of responding, responding with mercy.

Instead of getting caught in the Pharisees' damned if he does, damned if he doesn't set up, Jesus by passed the false choice of condemning or not condemning the woman and instead presented the Pharisees with a choice of their own. "Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone". And then he goes about writing on the ground.

After all the Pharisees walk away, Jesus looks up and asks the woman, “Has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and do not sin again”.

When the woman received mercy from Jesus, she actually received three gifts – first, actual life itself as she was not stoned to death, and then an opportunity for a new kind of life by a prod to change her ways. But she also learned something. She witnessed firsthand what it means and what it looks like to be merciful. I wonder how she may have put that lesson into practice in her own life.

So as we seek to understand mercy, we see that in this case it was a gift that had a concrete result, it did not judge and it incorporated a teaching moment.

The woman may not have been the only beneficiary of Jesus’ mercy that day. Richard Rohr, the Franciscan teacher and theologian, said that he believes that Jesus’ writing on the ground was another demonstration of mercy - towards the Pharisees this time - as they did not have to see a look of condemnation in his eyes and thereby feel shame. He spared them from that.

Mercy here was kind. It was also subtle, with a lesson that was there to be noticed and learned, or not.

So how are mercy and this Gospel reading relevant to us today on this Solidarity Sunday when we have the annual collection for the work of Development and Peace?

For some of us in the social justice and activist communities, maybe it is an opportunity for a re-think of our own about what mercy could mean for us. Because we want so badly to right injustices, because we hear the stories of difficult struggles from our partners and the

unfairness of them, it is easy to see villains everywhere. I mean how can you not get incensed when hearing of the shocking assassination last week of Berta Caceres, a Honduran Indigenous woman who was a defender of indigenous rights in Honduras and an advocate for the environment. She was standing up for her people's lives and livelihoods against a mega hydro-electric project and lost her own life as a result.

At times like this, we might **want** to cast stones like the Pharisees did. But maybe it is precisely then when it is most difficult that we need to learn from Jesus' example of a third way. When we don't feel merciful, that's when we must be and try even harder to find a way to infuse a spirit of mercy into our advocacy work and our search for justice.

Pope Francis has said that we have to do a better job of caring for the Earth, our common home, as people all over the world - especially the poor - are suffering from our neglect and wastefulness.

He also said that mercy is "the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life."

Through the stories that Development and Peace has been sharing all through Lent, we **have** been able to look into the eyes of our brothers and sisters in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, at least a little bit. We have learned about their lives, their families and their challenges and goals. We have also learned how support from local organizations that are partners of Development and Peace, has helped them in achieving these goals.

The Share Lent donation that you make today or the Share Year Round contributions that you make every month enable this to happen. They also allow us to advocate for changes that will lead to a more just world.

As a member of Development and Peace, I hope that you will look with eyes of mercy and support our work and the mission that the Canadian bishops gave us almost 50 years ago as we work to create a climate of change.