

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter 2018 Cycle B April 8, 2018**

In 2005, a man named Christo Brand, from South Africa, received a call that every parent dreads; his son had died in an automobile accident.

On his way to the hospital morgue, Christo received another phone call.

A friend said: "I just heard about your boy. It is a terrible thing when a parent must bury a child. I understand how it feels because I lost my own son in the same way. I wish I could give you some strength to bear this."

While I am pretty sure we don't recognize the name Christo Brand, we almost certainly recognize the name of his friend: Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa.

What makes this story truly remarkable isn't that the former president called to console a relatively unknown countryman; rather what makes this story incredible is that Christo Brand had been Nelson Mandela's prison guard for 12 years.

By 2003 their relationship had transformed into friendship.

Nelson Mandel had an insight that changed the course of history for his wounded nation.

He knew that the only way South Africa, and the world, could know peace, was through a commitment to reconciliation.

Reconciliation, understanding, compassion, forgiveness - they should be at the heart of what makes us an Easter people.

This Sunday after Easter, is known as Divine Mercy Sunday, a feast established by Pope St. John Paul II to celebrate the merciful love of God that has been revealed most completely through Jesus Christ.

Through the Risen Lord, God offers us mercy, reconciliation and the gift of peace, even when our sinful acts take us in a different direction.

As we heard in the Passion accounts, most of the disciples strayed away or even abandoned Jesus. Grippled by trepidation and doubt, they fled and hid in the upper room.

John the Evangelist tells us that Jesus burst through their darkness, and fear, and allowed them to see Him in their midst.

Reminding them of what he had promised the last time they were together, he greeted them with the simple words, "Peace be with you."

He didn't say, "I knew you'd scatter like frightened sheep." He didn't mention their apparent loss of hope.

Instead, as he blessed them with peace, he invited them to look at the scars left by what he had been through — the visible signs of death, now made powerless.

In what may be the greatest understatement in his Gospel, John simply says, "The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord."

Peace comes to the disciples and to us through reconciliation.

And most importantly just as the disciples were offered reconciliation through Jesus, they were now sent out to be

reconcilers of the world. “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.”

While this is certainly one scriptural basis for our Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is also a call for all of us, as followers of Christ, to bring forgiveness to others.

We experience reconciliation with God, and we are commissioned to be practitioners of reconciliation and builders of a new world.

As we also heard in our Gospel, Thomas made peace with our Lord, became reconciled to Him, and came to believe in Him, through a chance to touch his wounds.

When we encounter the wounds of others, including the ones caused by our actions and omissions, understanding can take place, and we can experience reconciliation with that person.

Thomas finally understood the God of unwavering love and life as he proclaims, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus invites all future believers into a life of being forgiven and forgiving. As we are reminded in our second reading, we are reborn by believing in Christ, by loving God, and by keeping his commandments.

It is not easy, and we will sometimes fail.

But the secret and the grace of Christianity is that the merciful Christ meets us in the midst of our failures and fears, offers us peace, and sends us forth again, and again, to do everything possible to share that peace with everyone in our life.

Embracing God’s gift of peace and mercy entails both the personal experience of reconciliation, and the commitment to building communities of justice, abundance, and equality.

Luke in the Acts of the Apostles portrays a totally transformed faith community.

Having been reconciled with the one whom they once abandoned on the cross, our ancestors in faith, now forge a community where no one will be abandoned again, no one will be scapegoated, no one is gripped by fear, and no one is betrayed for a handful of coins.

Sadly, as we know, such caring and loving communities, Christian or otherwise, are pretty hard to find.

So many of our fellow citizens live in communities and neighborhoods plagued by discord, poverty, a lack of decent and affordable housing, illegal guns, drug abuse, the disintegration of the family, a widening gap between rich and poor, and other conditions which create despair and spawn violence.

This past Wednesday was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King Jr.

Anticipating that event, our own Archbishop Lori in February issued a pastoral reflection entitled “The Enduring Power of Dr Martin Luther King Jr’s Principles of Nonviolence.” There is a link on our web site.

The Archbishop urges us to reconnect with Dr King’s teachings and example of non-violence and unity, needed more than ever in our violent and fragmented society.

Archbishop Lori writes: “Let us be clear: Dr. King’s principles are meant to change us and in changing us to change our society.

“They are addressed first and foremost to the heart, calling us to conversion, a conversion that leads to a different way of thinking, speaking and acting.”

We are reminded that a key principle of Catholic social teaching is “solidarity” which at its core means to commit oneself to the common good. Solidarity requires us to recognize that as brothers and sisters, we are equal because we share a common humanity. More profoundly, it means recognizing God in every person, and every person in God.”

As Dr King has written, “Nonviolence does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent, but to win his friendship and understanding.”

Friendships like Nelson Mandela and Christo Brand.

In his message on Divine Mercy Sunday in 2014, Pope Francis said that as Jesus showed the disciples his wounds, he was calling all disciples to abandon their fear of confronting the wounds of the world, trusting that the love of God is more powerful than evil and all the woundedness of history.

We are reminded by that description of the early Church in Acts, and by people like Nelson Mandela and Dr Martin Luther King Jr, that we too have been given the Holy Spirit, to be reconcilers in this world, and to build up communities of charity, generosity, and equality.

We can do it. We are an Easter people.