

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time – year C 2007

- 1) IF you have ever had to deal with a hardened criminal
 - a) You know that they can be difficult characters.
 - b) Life has taught them to be vicious
 - c) Prison has taught them to lie
 - d) The sheer magnitude of what they have done has caused them to create elaborate justifications, excuses and stories, relieving them of the guilt for the crimes they were convicted of.
- 2) This was the type of person Sister Helen Prejean encountered when asked to be the spiritual counselor of Matthew Poncelet.
 - a) In the movie *Dead Man Walking* based on the true story the actor Sean Penn portrays Poncelet much as he must have been in life
 - i) Devious, charming, simple, complex, but absolutely unwilling to accept responsibility for the deaths of two teenagers, found raped and shot in a field outside their small town.
- 3) Sister Helen, played by Susan Sarandon believes it is absolutely necessary for him to face the truth about what he did that night.
 - a) And thus even when he rejects her
 - b) Even when he insults her
 - c) She refuses to give up.
- 4) Because she believes his recognition of his guilt
 - a) is necessary for the salvation of his soul
 - b) is necessary for the healing of the parents of his victims
 - c) is necessary for justice to be done.
- 5) The movie *Dead Man Walking* made Helen Prejean famous.
- 6) It has caused her to be praised by some, and canonized by others.
 - a) And of course she deserves the recognition.
 - b) Because it is not easy to be so persistent in the pursuit of justice.
- 7) But have you ever met someone like Sr. Helen?
 - a) I am sure you have.
 - b) She is the one who blocks the sidewalk outside of businesses,
 - i) Protesting their unfair hiring policies,
 - (1) When we are just trying to walk down the crowded street
 - c) She is the one fighting for immigrants rights
 - (1) When we are the ones who want them all to go home
 - d) She is the one who stands up at community board meetings
 - e) Stands in front of locked churches
 - f) Stands in front of planned parenthood
 - g) Protesting whatever injustice is being committed there
 - i) When the rest of us just wish she would give up, shut up and go home.
- 8) In short she is that woman in the story Jesus tells us today.
 - a) A widow, a woman without rights in Jesus' society,
 - i) Nonetheless pesters a judge for justice – a judge who by his own admission has no respect for anyone, not even God
 - ii) Nevertheless, because she is so persistent, he relents and gives her the justice she insists upon.
- 9) The Gospel of Luke sees this story as an example of persistence in prayer.
 - a) And I suppose, that is part of it.
- 10) But if that is how Jesus originally saw this story, well then,
 - a) Jesus makes God out to be nothing more than a blasphemous Judge
 - b) Makes us out to be nothing more than a bunch of nags
 - c) And makes prayer nothing more than a persistent demand for what we think is right.
 - d) No, to see the story of the persistent woman
 - i) as a lesson in how to pray
 - ii) teaches us only one thing;

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- (1) that if we nag God enough, God will give in
 - iii) A strange lesson that; because that makes us more powerful than God; not exactly something that Jesus taught.
- 11) But that is not how JESUS originally saw this story;
- a) he did not see God in the blasphemous judge
 - b) Nor for that matter, in the nagging woman;
 - c) he did not see successful prayer as persistent nagging
 - d) Nor for that matter as the power to change God's mind.
- 12) he saw God in the whole story;
- 13) that if even in this world, so filled with injustice,
- a) Justice still can be done,
 - i) Well then God will certainly see to it that it is.
 - ii) Giving people maybe not everything they want but certainly what they deserve.
- 14) The thing is, Jesus asks at the end of the Gospel, when justice is finally done for God's people, will there be anyone around to recognize who it is who actually has brought it to pass?
- a) In short will there be any faith?
- 15) You see that for Jesus is the crucial question.
- a) Because he does not doubt that God's justice will be done;
 - i) He doubts that we will have the faith to know it when it is.
- 16) Faith is important.
- a) Faith opens up our eyes to see things they way God see them.
 - b) To see in that judge not an obstacle but a challenge to work for justice
 - c) To see in that woman not a nag but a prophet crying out for justice
 - d) An to see in every person,
 - i) who struggles to see to it that justice
 - (1) is finally, finally done,
 - ii) And that the world finally becomes a place
 - (1) where all people are valued and respected and have equal rights
 - iii) Nothing less than a child of God
- 17) Helen Prejean was such a person. And she was certain, so was Poncelet.
- a) That is why she persisted
 - b) That is why she nagged;
 - c) That is why she struggled with him
 - i) Because she knew that somehow, somehow justice would be done
 - ii) And it was;
 - (1) Shortly before his death the devious, charming, simple, complex Matthew Poncelet cracked and admitted he was guilty.
 - (2) Sister Helen says to him, "You did a terrible thing, but you have dignity now. Nobody can take that from you. You are a son of God."
 - (3) And so he was. And so are we all; when we work and struggle and protest and occasionally even nag to see to it that justice is done;
 - (4) But just as importantly that we believe that when justice is done
 - (a) We see nothing less than the presence of God.
 - (b) Just like Jesus saw in that parable
 - (c) Just like Helen saw in Matthew Poncelet.