

[Spirituality](#)



Congregants hold hands and pray for peace during Mass at All Saints Church in Milwaukee Aug. 18, 2016. (CNS/Juan C. Medina, Catholic Herald)



by Thomas Gumbleton

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Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Feb. 4, 2018](#)

Job 7:1-4, 6-7

Psalms 147

1 Corinthians 9:16-19, 22-23

Mark 1:29-39

In [last Sunday's Gospel](#) (as I mentioned in introducing today's), Jesus began his public life, which began with a very extraordinary event where he showed what was most important in that life and that is to overcome evil. When he went to the synagogue, there was someone there who, in the description of the people at that time, was possessed by demons. This is a way of personifying evil until Jesus shows his power over evil by driving out the devil, overcoming that evil.

We reflected on how there was evil present in our world. What is perhaps the most important evil we have to try to suppress following Jesus as his disciples? Last week I suggested perhaps violence because it's so rampant in our world. There was just the example that week of a 15-year-old boy going into his school and killing two other students. 15 years old. But now this week, perhaps you read it, a 12-year-old girl went into her little school, shot and wounded two other students. Our need to overcome this evil of violence in our society that is pervasive at every level — we really must do what we can.

But in today's Gospel, Jesus in a sense moves on. One of the ways to overcome evil, the evil of violence or any evil is by doing good, by being committed to reaching out in love in every possible way we can. Perhaps you've noticed at some point in the celebration of our Eucharist after the consecration, part of the prayer says this, praying to God about ourselves: "Inspire in us words and actions to comfort those who labor and are burdened. Help us to serve them truly after the example of Jesus and at his command."

That's what Jesus is doing today, showing us how to serve others truly. He gave us the command at the Last Supper, you may remember: "The one commandment I leave with you," Jesus tells his disciples (it's the last time he's with them on earth), "Love one another." Then he gives us an extraordinary challenge: "Love one another as I have loved you," a love that is total, without limit. He goes on to say, "There's no greater love than to lay down your life for another," for your brother or sister or any other member of the human family.

Jesus gave us the command, and he gave us the example, and we pray in our Eucharistic prayer that we be inspired to follow that command and follow the example of Jesus. I think when we begin to reflect on what it means to love one another, we can get some very clear guidance from today's Gospel. We all are aware of the need throughout our society in this country, but throughout the world too, of people who are oppressed, people who need to have justice done for them, people who are hungry, people who are homeless, people who are refugees.

We can reach out to them and love them by making a contribution. Sometimes we do that quite readily. But Jesus also is showing us when we say, "follow his example," the importance of reaching out in an individual, personal way. Why do you suppose he was all night there in that town of Capernaum healing people? He could have just blessed them and said, "Be healed." But no, every person is important to Jesus. So I'm sure throughout the night he greeted each individual, at least listened to each person's story of pain or hurt or illness — whatever it was, and he responded.

That's what Jesus does throughout his public life. It's never a healing that is sort of at a distance. Whenever Jesus confronts someone in need, someone suffering, someone anxious or concerned, Jesus spends time with them. There are so many examples in the Scriptures, but one that I remember that comes to mind is the story of the Roman centurion that comes to Jesus (not even a Jewish person), and says, "Come and heal my daughter. She's ill; she's dying." Jesus starts out for the house and the centurion says, "No, just do it right here." Jesus could, of course. He could have healed the child from afar, but he went and he goes into the house and he takes her by the hand (just as he takes Peter's mother-in-law in today's Gospel), and lifts her up: "Be healed."

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There's even another kind of important point where after everybody else is probably gasping, surprised and talking about it, Jesus says, "Wait a minute. This child's hungry. Give her something to eat." He was always very personal, very intimate with people. He showed his love in that kind of a personal one-to-one level. The more we can do that, the more we change ourselves and help to change one another, the more we will be overcoming evil in our world. If we can bring love into every aspect of our life, especially our relationships within our family, within our community, our neighborhood, our city, our world, if we can bring love, we will destroy the evil that otherwise seems to be overtaking our world.

So today's Gospel shows us what Jesus began to do in his public life, the most important thing: overcome evil by bringing love into every circumstance in which we are. When we can do that, we will heal our world, we will bring peace into our communities, and we will even bring peace into our world. Today I hope each of us listens deeply to this word of God that's not only spoken by Jesus, but acted by Jesus, and that we might follow his command and his example to love one another.

[Homily given Feb. 4, 2018, at St. Philomena, Detroit, Michigan. The transcripts of Bishop Thomas Gumbleton's homilies are [posted weekly](#) to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) to receive a free newsletter when the latest homily is posted.]