

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 16 January 2022

Scriptures: Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the first reading from the Old Testament Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we find pictured a bridegroom rejoicing over his bride. Isaiah tells the people that with such rejoicing, God too delights in all the people.

In the second reading from Paul's first letter to the Christians living in Corinth, he affirms that each and every person is especially and uniquely gifted. He details all the gifts that come from God, given by God for the common good of all people.

In the Gospel, John relates the story of the wedding feast in Cana. Jesus turns water into wine. But that is not the only transformation that takes place: sadness is turned into joy, and need is turned into abundance.

The point is that we are invited to change; we too may be filled again with the Holy Spirit.

Taken collectively, those readings are especially relevant as we celebrate this weekend, the life, inspiration, and challenges of Martin Luther King, Jr.

The starting point are the gifts that God has given to each one of us, as emphasized in the second scripture reading, and the challenge of how to use those gifts for the betterment and well-being of other people.

On the one hand, for example, we still do find individual as well as institutionalized racism in our society, both locally as well as nationally. On the other hand, we have come a long way in terms of equality, affirmative action, employment, and non-

discrimination laws. Many, if not most all of the “white only” signs are now gone.

Despite what we still see around us as negative, nevertheless we need to also keep in mind the progress we as a society, locally, nationally, and internationally, have accomplished through the use of our God-given gifts.

In that regard, we have been guided and inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals approved by all 193 nations at the turn of the century in the year 2000.

What has been accomplished?

Over the past few years, each day, on average, another 300,000 people around the world gained access to electricity for the very first time.

Every day, another 300,000 people were able to access clean drinking water for the very first time.

Never before has such a large portion of humanity been literate, enjoyed a middle-class cushion, lived such long lives, or been confident that their children would survive.

Speaking of children, child deaths are also becoming far less common. Only about 4% of children worldwide now die by the age of five. Of course, that is still horrifying, but it is down from 19% in 1960, and 7% in 2003.

In fact, children in Mexico and Brazil today, are less likely to die by the age of 5, than U.S. children were as recently as 1970.

Currently, and sadly, approximately 15,000 children around the world die each day. But back in 1990, it was 30,000 kids who died each day.

It might seem out-of-touch and naïve to look to the progress we have made. Afterall, we are still worldwide surrounded by corruption, authoritarianism, murder, and torture.

However, the world's population is living longer and better than ever before. World poverty is not worsening nor staying the same. In fact, the most important trend in the world today is arguably a huge reduction in poverty.

Until the 1950's, a majority of the human family always lived in extreme poverty (defined as less than \$ 2.00 per person per day).

In the early 1980's, when I started as a university professor, 44% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty. Today, fewer than 10% of the world's population live in extreme poverty.

And turning again to children, many people think that only a third have been vaccinated. In fact, worldwide, 86% of all one-year-olds have been vaccinated against diphtheria and tetanus.

Obviously, there is still very much to be concerned about, especially as related to climate change. But a failure to acknowledge global progress can certainly leave people feeling hopeless and ready to give up. In fact, reflecting upon today's scripture readings and the various gifts that God has given us, and the worldwide progress that has been achieved thus far, this does show us what is possible, and encourages even greater efforts to improve opportunity worldwide.

Each one of us is called by our God to do our part, using the gifts God gave us, to contribute positively to the common good of all people. That is our call as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

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