

Vision of a New World Memorial Day Monday, May 28, 2018 8:15 AM
Rm 8:18-30; Mt 5:38-48 (For Our Country) (Disciples of Jesus are called on to bring people through these conflicts in the most peaceful and just way possible.)

In our readings today we have of vision of a new world. St. Paul says, “The creation is groaning.” The idea is the groaning of a woman giving birth. **The creation is pregnant with some new life, but it’s a very difficult delivery.** It’s a very long delivery, and it’s a very painful delivery.

Meanwhile, there is a vanguard, those who are predestined for mission, called to mission, prepared for the proclamation of this new creation: called into service, equipped for service, even glorified, Paul says, and yet—and yet—not really in possession of the gift, of the promise, only having it in hope, and as he says, “Who hopes for what they have?” We hope for what we don’t have. So clearly even **the vanguard, the predestined for mission group, even they do not actually have this fullness of redemption. And the new creation is only begun in a sort of inchoate way within them.**

So this is really describing a world of great suffering, and the suffering is not of a physical nature, as with the poor for example. If you don’t have enough food, you suffer the pangs of hunger. If you are sick, you suffer the pangs of disease. This is a different kind of suffering. **This is the suffering of knowing that the world as we know it is passing away, and yet still being part of it.** The suffering is being called to a higher life and having glimpses of it, and yet not being able really to live in it. And in this pain and suffering created by the tension between these two different layers of reality, the one begun in Christ drawing all things to himself, the other part of history, which is a long period of foundering around, human beings thinking they know what they are doing, thinking they know what’s good, for the most part making it up for themselves as they go, living by appearances, in terms of the Book of Genesis eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, rather than letting God guide them on the road to good, to truth, to life.

So we are in this world and it’s the **world that involves conflict**, as the gospel points out. Now these conflicts can be exaggerated, but they are real. But the point of the gospel is, and the point of St. Paul as well is, **disciples of Jesus are called on to bring people through these conflicts in the most peaceful and just way possible.** The gospel does not say you will not have enemies. If you love God, you will not have enemies—no, it doesn’t say that. **You will have enemies, but you need to learn to love them.**

Now this is not something that is always possible, but it is the goal, and it is the aim that God himself has created for all of us. We have to work toward this. And as we work toward it, we need to encourage our government leaders to work toward it as well. We cannot exactly lead a truly authentic Christian life all by ourselves in our little parish here. **Our role is to be leaven in society**, thereby causing all of society to rise. And **it requires certain sorts of actions from us that are really sacrificial.** One of the things we need to give up is our sense of always being right or **knowing what is right. That really is a property that belongs properly to God alone.** That’s why Jesus said you have to learn how to **love your enemies, because that way you are learning how to be a child of God.** It is God who is right. And if you love your enemies, as God

does, as God loves everyone by necessity because God is love—so God loves everyone and everything by necessity, cannot not do so—**we become more like God by acting like God. And this is how the leaven works, raising up the world. So we have a lot of work to do.**

Meanwhile, we need to do all we can at every level of society and government to promote this work. It's not as if the work of Christ is now to be done independently of the rest of society. No, **it's precisely in society this has to be done.** It is not as if there is some other independent program that is self-sufficient. **This is the program God has given us.**

Now on the way there are wars, and today we celebrate those who have fallen in those wars. Originally this was called “Decoration Day,” the idea was to decorate graves. But I would say today what we need to do is **focus, not as much on those who have died, as those who have been wounded by war**, those who have given their lives in that way that they have lost their limbs or their minds or their hearts or their capacity to live a full life, and now are, in a sense, left to stumble through life. I would say if we were to use the gospel to direct our concerns, we would be really concerned about **veterans who have been injured**, who are now homeless or without work or in other ways neglected, since all of that is due to their effort, whether directed rightly or wrongly by their leaders, their effort to do what is right by their fellow citizens, and do what is right for their families and for their country. **And love of country is a virtue, even though it must involve love of enemies as well.** So today we think about all these wonderful visions that God has given us, especially St. Paul's wonderful vision in the Letter to the Romans; and we might think about how we might advance a little bit this plan God has for us.