

Pentecost 6, Proper 8
St. Paul's/Resurrección, Mount Vernon, WA

June 30, 2024
Rev. Paul Moore

As you read this, I am in Ecuador visiting family and friends, and revisiting places precious to us. Ecuador, if you have followed it in the news, is not a happy place right now. Gangs have coalesced in an unprecedented way to exert control over towns and cities, especially along the coast. Violence is at an all-time high, and the brazenness with which it is carried out is stupefying. It is especially so since Ecuador for decades has been known as the Switzerland of the Andes. Trouble has rocked Peru with the Shining Path uprising of the 80's and 90's. Drug trafficking through Colombia has maintained an ongoing guerrilla war since I was a child. Ecuador, however, has always been a haven of peace, with a strong economy, a relatively stable government, high education level and low major crime rates.

I'm sure you're wondering why I chose to go. I go because at its heart I still believe in the old Ecuador. Places like El Salvador, Nicaragua and the two countries I just mentioned, have a history of violence and totalitarian rule. It's like it's in their DNA; they just do this, but for Ecuador this is new. It is NOT in its DNA. Yes, these are troubled times, but I truly believe in the end the Ecuadorian people will not allow it to continue. There are deeper, largely unconscious things going on that will right the ship once again.

This is the theme of the readings today. In the lesson from Sacred History, the prophet reminds the people that in God there is hope. Yes, there is trouble now, but have patience. God does not willingly afflict. God will bring peace once again.

In the lesson from the Apostolic Instruction, St. Paul is on a mission to aid Christians in trouble in Jerusalem. He is raising money for them, and the Corinthians, a wealthy congregation in a place of economic prosperity, is their target. "Help alleviate the suffering of our fellow believers," he urges, not so there will be reversal of fortunes, but that there be fairness and equity. He wants to offer the struggling believers in Jerusalem a lifeline, a reason to keep on hoping.

In the Gospel lesson we hear about two back-to-back healings. One is nestled in the context of the other, showing that they are not unrelated, but deal with the same issue: An unsolvable medical issue charged with urgency is solved by the healing power of the presence of the Son of God. The message is the same again. Yes, things do not look good, but keep hope, because God is at work. There is reason to hope, which means there is reason to keep on keeping on.

I read a headline the other day about Canada preparing for a possible civil war in the U.S. It highlights the deep divisions in our society today. It just seems that right and left, rather than trying to find common ground, are content to drift further and further apart.

The narratives on each side seem more and more disconnected. It's not just differing interpretation of the facts anymore, or even a different selection of facts deemed relevant. The very facts themselves seem to be different depending on where you stand on the political spectrum. Many are saying that we just do not have any good choices for President in this coming November's elections.

However, Dr. William Ury, an anthropologist, conducted a study about human conflict. He wrote a book called *The Third Way, Why We Fight and How We Can Stop*¹. He noticed that in cultures around the world and through time, when divisions split a people down the middle, when the choice seems to be only one way or the other way, the option of a third way is not only possible, but a very viable option. This is not just a compromise, a middle-of-the-road idea, but a deep search for what truly holds us together, and a recentering on those things rather than the things that divide us. It's almost an unconscious thing that happens.

I do not know if Dr. Ury is a religious man or not, but it would not surprise me. He echoes the core of today's readings. There is always hope. There is always reason to keep on keeping on, not in blindly clinging to our position against all odds, but in deep-level, respectful dialog; in conversation that is open enough to be honest, and humble enough to focus on what is truly important.

The Church has a checkered past in this regard, but when we are at our best, we do it well. We do know the bottom line: God loves us all and wants to be in relationship with us all. The Church is the community of people who seek to be in relationship with God and one another as we see and understand it in Jesus. As such a church, we seek to live out lives of peace and justice born of love. We seek to give hope to the captives like the prophet in the first reading. We seek to give help to the helpless as reflected in the second reading, and we seek to bring wholeness and life where there is disease and death, as in the Gospel lesson today.

If we believe that God is healing and restoring the world, and that we are recipients of and participants in that healing and restoration, then there is always room for hope born of faith and love. That is the effect of the Gospel message. Now go, live it into our divided and dying world.

¹ Ury, William L. *The third side: Why we fight and how we can stop*. Penguin, 2000.