Fr. Jack Conley
Homily
St. Teresa of Avila • Thursday 28th Week Ordinary Time • October 15, 2020

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I'm a softie when it comes to those short vignettes of thoughtfulness and kindness
on the final footage of the evening news.
Some time ago I was stirred by the narrative around a skating park in
South Brunswick, NJ
13-year-old Gavin Mabes got caught on video-tape showing his true character.
Gavin and several middle-school friends had just arrived at the skate park.
The park was **empty** — except for little Carter Bruynell,
who was there with his mother, celebrating his fifth birthday.
Carter is on the autism spectrum, and
big groups of older kids can make him nervous,
so his mom, Kristen, was fully prepared to get him out of there.
But she **wasn't** prepared for what happened next.
Immediately Gavin started chatting with the little guy,
telling him he was already better on the skateboard at 5
than he was as an older kid.
And the rest of his friends kind of followed suit
and then started singing Happy Birthday to Carter," Kristen said,
beginning to tear up.
"That really blew me away,
because you just want to see the kindness in the world.
And I wanted Carter to have a good birthday, but he had the best."

Today's readings got me thinking of all the kinds of human experiences
that can increase and swell, almost naturally.
Gavin Mabes and his classmates are wonderful examples.

Way back when I was in college
students would drink a very sweet and very cheap wine called **Ripple**.

Mind you, I never drank the stuff…!
I had cultivated a far more refined taste for good quality cabernet sauvignon!

Anyway, today's feast Teresa of Avila,
reformer of the Carmelites and reformer of the Church,
got me thinking of another RIPPLE:
…the kind of ripple that occurs when you toss a stone into a placid lake,
and concentric circles begin to move out and form and transform the lake

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Remember how with Elijah's intervention,
the widow's jug of oil lasted far beyond one batch of loaves.
Or the little boy's lunch of a couple of fish and several loaves of bread
fed more than 5000 people.
When we do something in God's name,
however small and insignificant the act may look to others,
it has the capacity to create a 'ripple effect',
touching other people and drawing them closer to God.
These things are often described as 'random acts of kindness'.

The ripple effect is defined as
'the continuing and spreading results of an event or action.'
The healing of the cripple described in Acts of the Apostles chapter 3
was like a pebble being thrown into water;
it created ripples all around.
Some of these were positive *(2000 people being added to the church);*
some not so much! *(less favorable was an overnight stay in prison for Peter and John, and a subsequent interrogation by the religious leaders resulting in being instructed not to speak in the name of Jesus again!)*

Today's readings offer another ripple — in a series of contrasts actually:
Ephesians: "In Christ and through his **blood** we have been redeemed."
*(early church **hymn**, a mini-confession of faith*
woven into these lines of wonder and adoration)
Luke: "the **blood** of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world."

Jesus repeats stories about the Kingdom of Heaven having this ripple effect:
small bit of yeast leavens or transforms the whole batch of dough. (Matthew 13:33)
And the Gospels are saturated with examples of this ripple effect —
as Jesus liberates those weighed-down with oppressive yokes
bringing joy to broken hearts
sowing seeds of hope in the desperate and the doomed
And this is what God is doing NOW in human history.
And it's having a ripple effect… however…

3

Archbishop — Saint Oscar Romero once said,
"Preaching that does not point out sin
is not the preaching of the Gospel.

A preaching that awakens,
a preaching that enlightens,
as when a light-turned-on
awakens, and of course, annoys a sleeper…
That is the preaching of Christ, calling:
Wake up! Be converted!
This is the church's authentic preaching." Romero thundered.

"Woe to you who build the memorials of the prophets
whom your fathers killed."

Isn't it interesting how we as Church canonize Joan of Arcs, Martin Luther Kings, Oscar Romeros…
just decades after they were criticized by journalists, disparaged by Church authority, then martyred!

And today, I think of another junior high student, a 14-year-old African American,
whose name became an icon in civil rights movement.
Emmett Till lived with his mother in Chicago, but on August 28, 1955,
while visiting with relatives in Mississippi,
was accused of offending a white woman in her family's grocery store.
That night he was kidnapped by the woman's husband and his half-brother.
Emmett's body, tortured and brutally murdered,
was found in Tallahatchie River 3 days later.
His killers were acquitted by an all-white jury.
Emmett's mother insisted on an open casket;
as tens of thousands viewed his horrendously disfigured face
through the casket's glass enclosure.

I am embarrassed — ashamed, to admit that I never heard story
(and I grew up in Chicago)
(Maybe it was simply succumbing to the temptation
to avert one's eyes)
But I never heard the story of Emmett Till
until six years ago
When Laquan McDonald, 17-year-old African American
killed in Chicago on October 20, 2014
While McDonald was slowly walking away
the police officer unloaded 16 bullets into the youth,
most of them as he lay on the ground

Political scientist Dr. Megan Ming Francis,
"Not a few bad apples, the tree is infected"

Don't need to demonize, nor bludgeon each other with guilt,
but we do need to enter into a crucial conversation, we need to talk about it,
because it's pretty clear we have <u>not</u> talked about racism in the past

I need not recite the long litany of names this morning,
as racism continues to haunt us in this country.

But we DO need to enter into that conversation,
as challenging as it may be.

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Finally, under the umbrella of **RIPPLE** EFFECT,
we know this phenomenon can be either positive or negative,
the impact can be life-giving and hopeful, or corrosive and violent

Gavin Mabes' true character was captured on that video
challenging lots of us, not just his 8th grade classmates
The decision to be kind, to engage, what Pope Francis calls "culture of encounter"
will determine the outcome

But we are living in an age where civil discourse is dissolving,
a time when even families decide that Thanksgiving Dinner must have rules
where particular topics are not allowed for discussion

Isn't it interesting that Jesus reserves his harshest rebuke,
not for sinners — tax collectors and prostitutes,
but for leadership… because of their hypocrisy, their rigidity,
their unwillingness to engage, to encounter, to compromise
Part of the responsibility of leadership, it seems to me —
(whether Church, corporate or business, political leadership)
is to **portray "best practices"**, to **model good behavior**
to create a positive, life-giving and hopeful ripple effect

I conclude with a stanza from Robert Frost's, *The Road Not Taken*

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Photo: Linus Nylund