

## **Homily (23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time) – 9/10/2017**

*As we gather in church, people in Florida, some who have disobeyed a mandatory evacuation order, are bracing for a monster storm. So too are other men and women and children who have evacuated north to parts of Georgia and South Carolina. They wonder if their homes will, be there when they return.*

*Millions of people are preparing for the storm by taking refuge in hotels or other people's homes or shelter centers. It is the season of hurricanes and Hurricane Irma is about to make landfall. She is angry and she is packing a punch. But you know hurricanes can teach us something about life. And even teach us about today's gospel.*

*Oh I don't mean about the physical destruction that can come from a category-4 storm, with powerful winds whipped to 150 mph that blow houses apart like matchsticks or bring relentless rain and a storm surge of up to 12 feet with catastrophic flooding.*

*Hurricane Irma, which is as big as the country of France, and could cover the state of Michigan. Hurricane Irma the most powerful hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic has at its center, like every hurricane, an eye. And there in that eye, which could cover the area of Detroit, are calm and soft breezes. So what?*

*Well, I was thinking. Isn't it impossible to avoid the hurricanes of life. Oh I don't mean the physical storm that is lashing the state of Florida. I don't mean those monsters named Harvey, or Irma, or Jose. I mean the angry emotional hurricanes that often make landfall on the landscape of our personal lives. They come in season and out of season. They are the angry conflicts between husband and wife, the hurtful words between parents and children, the lifelong wounds between teenage brothers and sisters, raging emotional hurts that sometimes break up marriages and shatter families.*

*And just as there is in the eye of raging hurricane Irma, a still island of calm. Jesus gives some calming rules on how to weather emotional storms in our human relationships.*

*Now, Jesus is not naïve about human nature. He knows human beings can be defensive. They might not be open to reconciliation. Or they have locked you into being a certain type of person and are not open to you.*

*So, in some scripture passages he tells his followers, "I am sending you out as lambs among wolves, be as shrewd, cunning, clever as a snake, yet innocent harmless as a dove." In another passage he advises, "if people in a town do not accept my teaching, shake the dust from your sandals."*

*So, Jesus is not a dewy eyed romantic. Still we are called to forgive, to reconcile. By the way let's stop the homily for a moment. Are you a good reconciler? A good forgiver? And if you and I are not, and I preach to myself first, the rest of the homily is useless. Yet, if you and I are not good forgivers, what are we doing here? Have you had to ask for anyone's forgiveness in the past year? Have you had to forgive anyone? Now you might say I am not an offending person. I have gone for a whole year and not offended anyone. No one, really, really?*

*Well, for most of us who do need to reconcile with someone. Here is the sequence Jesus suggests. By the way the full sequence Jesus gives in the gospel for reconciliation, you can see happening on the nightly news. It is what is going on between the United States and North Korea. Jesus says go see the person one on one. Just keep it between you two. America has, through backdoor diplomacy, gone one on one with North Korea. Yet, the North Koreans do not trust us. And you know without trust there is not much of a human relationship. Despite how we in America view the problem, from the North Korean point of view, they mistrust us. They respond with accusations. Reconciliation appears to be out of the question. Sad to say this sometimes happens on a smaller stage in families. Perhaps your own family has members, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters who no longer speak to one another. There is a loss of trust.*

*Yet, have you noticed some television shows focusing on family life, will often model how to engage in reconciliation? We all need lessons on how to do it. If people watch fictional characters working through difficult issues, there's a chance they will start to do so for themselves. Okay back to the nightly news and today's gospel.*

*Jesus what happens when reconciliation between America and North Korea, one on one, doesn't work? Jesus says enlist the help of an outsider, a third party. United States did. We enlisted the help of China.*

*You know this too happens in human relationships especially in the family. Many times when a husband and wife need reconciliation they enlist the help of a third party. They go to a marriage counselor to clarify the issues.*

*Back to North Korea and the United States. Okay Jesus, what do we do when even a third party can't help countries like United States and North Korea to reconcile? Jesus says bring to the larger organization. We did. We took it to the United Nations.*

*And Jesus, what happens if even bringing our problems with North Korea to the United Nations doesn't work? What then? We might be afraid to know what happens if a marriage seeking reconciliation is brought to a third party and it doesn't work? What then? Or a family seeking reconciliation is brought to family counseling and it doesn't help. What then?*

*You know Jesus goes to great pains in the gospel to spell out the importance of reconciliation. It is why he came. He knows that as human relationships go, so goes the church, so goes the world. So, can God count on you? Can the church count on you? Can we count on each other to be good forgivers? Can we?*