

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, September 6, 2015 Black Catholic Apostolate

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Isaiah 35:4-7 "Fear not! The eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will hear."

Responsorial Psalm 146 "Praise the Lord, my soul!"

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: James 2:1-5 "God chose the poor to be heirs of the kingdom."

Gospel: Mark 7:31-37 "He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

[Peter] When I prayed over the Scriptures for today, I thought of a poem about a violin:

### **THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND**

It was battered and scarred, and the auctioneer  
thought it scarcely worth his while  
to waste much time on the old violin,  
but held it up with a smile.  
"What am I bid, good folks?" he cried.  
"Who'll start the bidding for me?  
A dollar, a dollar, -now two, only two?  
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?  
Three dollars once, three dollars twice, going for three...

But no! From the room far back a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow; Then wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening up all of the strings, he played a melody pure and sweet, As sweet as an angel sings:



The music ceased, and the auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low,  
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?" And he held it up with the bow.  
A thousand dollars, - and who'll make it two? Two thousand, and who'll make it three?  
Three thousand once, and three thousand twice and going and gone!" said he.  
The people cheered, but some of them cried,  
"What changed its worth?" The man replied,

### ***THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND!***

And many a one with life out of tune and battered and torn with sin  
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin.

A bag of pot, a glass of wine, a game and he travels on.  
She's going, once, he's going twice, she's going and almost gone.

But the Master comes and the foolish crowd never can quite understand  
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought  
By the touch of the Master's hand.

[Written by Myra Brooks Welch (adapted slightly by Peter Chepaitis)  
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[Peter] To really hear the message of the Gospel, I need to be like that violin. I need to know my need for God, my need to be touched by the Master. Only then can I hear the Good News of Jesus. I need to look into the mirror and see my "warts." Like a toad, I have warts - some are invisible to everyone else, but they are there.

They are my own weakness, my own addictions, my own powerlessness, my own sin. When I admit to myself that they exist, then I can hear the message of the prophet Isaiah, and the Lord Jesus - *God loves me, wart & all!*

I may not be an alcoholic or addicted to some other substance, but, as one of my mentors used to say, we are all recovering self-a-holics. Gerald May said it this way, to be alive and human is to be addicted and in need of grace.

But it does not stop there. Jesus touches the man who is deaf, and his ears are opened. Then he touches his tongue, spitting - as the healers of his time used to do - and he is able to speak the good news of God's love and mercy.

Once I know that I need to be healed, I can receive the touch of the master's hand. Then I will have my eyes opened to the needs of others. Then I can not only hear the music of the violin, I myself can be an instrument of healing and peace.

Isaiah in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading says, "*the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf will be cleared.*" We are called as disciples of Christ to hear the cry of the poor in our midst, and in the world. Pope Francis, in *The Joy of the Gospel*, puts it this way:

Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society. This demands that we be docile and attentive to *the cry of the poor* and to come to their aid.

But Isaiah tells of the healing of the earth as well as of the people. "*Streams will burst forth in the desert, and rivers in the steppe.*" Pope Francis tells of the call to hear not only the cry of the poor, but the cry of the earth as well. He writes in his Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*:

Today, ... we ... must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment,  
so as to hear both *the cry of the earth* and the cry of the poor.

We are witnessing global climate changes which threaten not only human life but all life on earth. Glaciers melt, floods destroy, species become extinct and forests are stripped. Irresponsible mining and drilling, valuing profit over people, unsustainable methods of farming and overuse of chemicals lead to pollution of the air and the water as well as disease and damage to our children & grandchildren.

Pope Francis writes: Our sister, the earth "now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor.

And all of this falls most heavily on the poor women & men who are our sisters & brothers - those who cause the least damage to the environment & who are harmed by the corporations & nations that do the worst damage.

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[Anna] But there is **hope**. More & more people & especially children are beginning to understand that everything is connected & that **ALL** creation is sacred to God. Fr. Peter & I watched a documentary film this past week that gave us both **hope**. It was called **Dukale's Dream** & it is about a coffee farmer in Ethiopia and his love for his family & the land. It describes the friendship between Hugh Jackman [An Australian actor who lives in NYC] & 3 generations of Dukale's family.

Through the work of *World Vision* [an Australian organization] that promotes Fair Trade coffee not only did a whole community move from poverty to a healthy & sustainable way of life, but Hugh Jackman & other prosperous westerners came to a conversion of heart & a change of lifestyle. He moved from **giving money** to becoming part of the solution.

He even started a company himself – *Laughing Man Coffee & Tea*– which buys fairly traded coffee from all over the world from small & family farmers like his friend Dukale. When he sells the coffee from his friend's farm, he packages it under the name of "*Dukale's Dream*." [We saw the documentary movie on TV thru 'Movies On Demand', but it is also available on Amazon.] The *Fair Trade Movement* [www.fairtradeusa.org] is for us a source of great **hope** that poverty & environmental destruction are **not** inevitable. It is a way of using capitalism & economic development for the good of people & the earth.

This movement certifies brands of coffee & tea, cocoa & chocolate that pay growers a fair price & requires of them to practice sustainable agriculture which protects the environment. [For example, coffee plants that produce the best coffee need to be grown in the shade of other trees, so forests are protected & the earth is more able to process CO<sup>2</sup>.]

When I found out about this about 12 years ago, from materials my IHM Sisters congregation sent, I told Fr. Peter about it because he **has to** have his coffee in the morning. He looked for Fair Trade Coffee in Schoharie County where we live. He couldn't find it anywhere. So he wrote a letter to the head buyer at **Price Chopper**. He received a response almost immediately, telling him that they would begin to carry the fair trade lines of Green Mountain Coffee. Now **Price Chopper** carries its own brand of Fair Trade Coffee & it's available in **Shop Rite, Hannaford** & even **Sam's Club**. [You can find more information on the "Reflections" page of the Bethany Ministries website – [www.bethmin.org](http://www.bethmin.org). This is the current logo.]



[Peter] When we told this story at a HNP gathering of Friars and lay partners who work for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, we said it was a small thing. Immediately a young man who had just returned from being a lay missionary in Central America *jumped up* & told us that it was not a little thing.

He told us that coffee farmers there are guaranteed 33 cents on a dollar if they agree to raise their crop in a sustainable way, pay their workers fairly and care for the environment, rather than 8 or 9 cents as the market fluctuates.

And if they can't support themselves & pay their workers, sometimes they are forced to emigrate to find work and support their families, or they are tempted to grow a cash crop - like cocaine!

Both Pope Francis and St. Francis are prophets of hope. If we can live the attitudes & wisdom in the Pope's preaching & writing we will be more able to hear the cry of the earth and of the poor. The Canticle of Brother Sun that Francis of Assisi wrote sings of the call to be healed and to be healers that is in today's scriptures. I challenge you to study it and live the attitudes that it expresses.

♪ Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.  
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good.

Brother Wind & Air that pervades, vary their moods to sustain all you've made  
Sister Earth, our mother who nurtures, feeding, yielding flower and herb. ♪



A prayer for our earth [by Pope Francis]

[All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.]

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it,

that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.