

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C  
July 10, 2016

*Holding All Things Together*

Readings: Deuteronomy 30: 10-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” I suspect that practically all of us have felt at one time or another, this gnawing sense that something is hanging on by bare threads, that no matter how much we try, we are holding things together, but just barely, clinging for dear life. It can happen in school, in a job, in a family situation. It is not a good feeling.

But when we feel that the peace of our society is hanging by a thread, it somehow feels even worse. It is so overwhelming as to threaten to paralyze us. In today’s second reading, St. Paul gives voice to our belief that Jesus is himself the image of the invisible God and in Christ all things are held together. But let us be honest...that sentiment does not happen magically, nor is it supposed to happen that way. Believers cling to the hope of Jesus, we trust in his Word to transform the world, but God will never do so absent our cooperation.

In today’s Gospel, we are privy to a question asked by a man described as a Scholar of the Law. The questioner here was likely a scribe, an expert in the Mosaic Law. Though designed as a trick question, nevertheless the truths contained are truly timeless. Most importantly, Jesus expounded on what it means to be a neighbor.

While home visiting recently, my parents informed me that a family on their small block just sold their house. There are only four on their block. You mean the Bosshardt’s house—the couple that had owned the house 40 years ago! Several have lived there since I moved out nearly thirty years ago and I still associated the house with those who were **my** neighbors, not those of my parents. After all, the current residents weren’t **my** neighbors!

Or are they? Saint Luke's Gospel is quoting from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, a key passage in the Torah that sums up in a sentence the real call to life as sons and daughters of God. Above all, we are called to love the Lord with our whole, heart, soul, mind and strength. Imagine if we truly did this. Imagine the power as a society if we did this. Instead, all too often and more recently, quite tragically so, we have pointed fingers, sought to blame others, or allowed our righteous anger to consume us.

With the immediacy of social media, omni-present television cameras, troubled histories of oppression, racism and mistrust of persons in authority- all these factors have coalesced into a volatile mixture that cries out for peace.

But which voice will win? Will it be peace or will it be despair, that insidious feeling when people feel as though it makes not difference anymore, so why bother to try. It isn't going to make a difference. Martin Luther King Jr. once said- "We must live together as brothers (understand also 'and sisters') or perish as fools."<sup>1</sup> There are times in which his prediction seems to be coming true, only in the wrong direction. We are living as fools because we cannot live together in peace. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

It raises the questions-Do we take Saint Paul's words to the Colossians seriously? Do we really believe that He can hold all things together? The command that the Lord enjoins on us is not too remote or too mysterious. God is not asking of us something too difficult, only to obey God's laws, which of necessity includes caring for one another, watching out for one another, bearing one another's burdens.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from a Speech given in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 22, 1964

If my own experience makes it difficult to understand another's anger at feeling themselves to be targeted and labeled, this in no way lessens the reality of that anger. But I can try to listen to that pain and engage it in conversation.

Nor can I possibly comprehend how stressful it must be for an officer to begin the evening shift in a squad car, wondering if tonight, in the blink of an eye, I will have a violent encounter that will change my life and possibly that of another's forever. But at least I can pray for that officer, invoking the protection of St. Michael the Archangel for his or her safety and ask God to guide their prudential decisions and interactions.

Is it really too much for us to work for peace, which by its very nature entails striving to achieve a just society? Pope Paul VI wrote about the relationship between peace and justice in his World Day of Peace Address. He said: "But it is precisely from this place that the invitation we give to celebrate Peace resounds as an invitation to practice Justice: "Justice will bring about Peace" (Cf: Is 32:17). We repeat this today in a more incisive and dynamic formula: "If you want Peace, work for Justice."<sup>2</sup>

Moses challenged the people to realize that the commandments are neither too mysterious, nor too remote- we are to love our brothers and sisters, seeing that what unites us is that we are all members of God's family.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul VI, World Day of Prayer for Peace, 1 January 1972