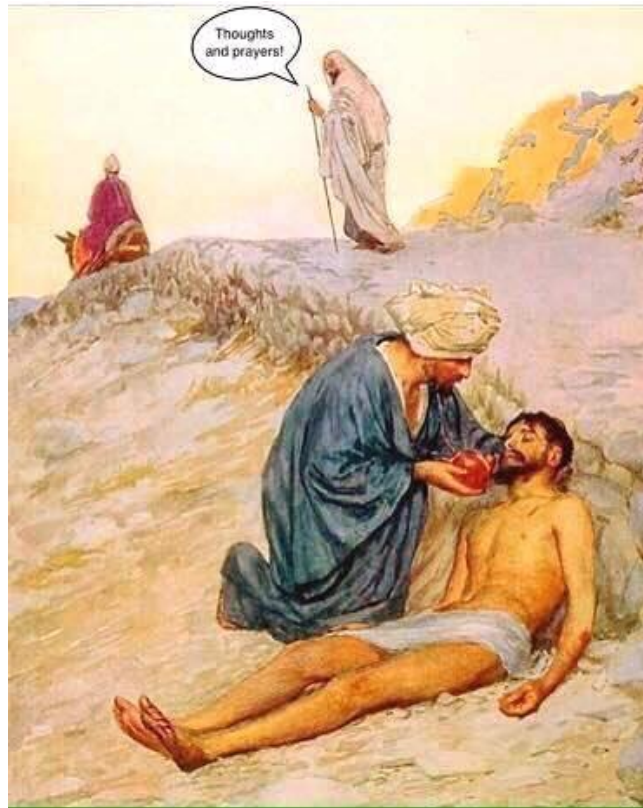


COMFORTLESS



from the Collect of the Day

O God, the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: Do not leave us comfortless, but send us your Holy Spirit to strengthen us, and exalt us to that place where our Savior has gone before. *Amen.*

We all know the story. It is one of the most beloved of Jesus' parables. It began when a lawyer tried to trick Jesus with his question. "Teacher, which commandment is the first of all?" he asked. Jesus, as we all know, replied that "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,

and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it, thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself." Ah, but remember, this was a lawyer who was interrogating Jesus, so he then asked, "Okay, but who then is my neighbor?"

So, Jesus began to tell the story, the story about "a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and who fell into the hands of thieves, who stripped him, beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road;" Jesus said. "And when the priest saw the poor man who had been beaten by the thieves, he passed by on the other side of the road. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan of all people, a cursed Samaritan while traveling came near to him; and when he saw the poor man lying in the ditch, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. Then he put the poor man on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him there. The next day he took out two denarii, which he gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think," asked Jesus of the lawyer, "which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of thieves?"

The lawyer replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

I recently posted a meme on the St. John's Facebook page that mimics this story. Many of you may have seen it. There in a single frame was pictured this familiar story of the Good Samaritan. In the portrait, the Good Samaritan and the man who fell into the hands of thieves are seen together on the side of the road. The Good Samaritan is seen holding up the poor man's head up and putting a cup of water to his parched lips. In the far distance, down the road some, is pictured the back of the priest of Jesus' story, riding away on a donkey, and if you look carefully at the picture, you will notice in this meme that he is dressed as a bishop, with a cope and mitre. In the middle of the meme is pictured the Levite, dressed in traditional Middle Eastern robes with a walking stick in his hand, and who is himself looking back over his shoulder towards the side of the road, looking back at the Good Samaritan and the man who had fallen into the hands of thieves, and a dialogue bubble or balloon has been added to this drawing with the words spoken by the passing Levite. In the bubble was his utterance as he looked back upon the two on the side of the road, "thoughts and prayers," he said. Thoughts and prayers.

"Thoughts and prayers" are not enough, says Jesus in this parable, if they do not lead us to act. The man who had fallen

into the hands of thieves would have died, if the others offered only thoughts and prayers. The Good Samaritan is the one took action. He is the one who stopped what he was doing, who left behind his own concerns, who wasn't too busy for the needs of this poor man who had fallen into the hands of thieves, who didn't just give him money, didn't just write a check, and told him to get whatever care he needed. No, the Good Samaritan stopped what he was doing and took personal action, attending to the needs of the poor man.

So, which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of thieves, Jesus asked? It was the one who showed him mercy, who just didn't talk about mercy, who didn't just offer his thoughts and prayers, but who actually did something, who went to the dying man and bandaged his wounds, poured oil and wine on them as an anti-septic. Then the Good Samaritan put the poor man on his own animal, and then walked beside it and took him to an inn, and then took further care of him there. And then the next day the Good Samaritan before the he went on with his journey, gave the innkeeper money, and said, 'Take care of my friend while I am away; and when I come back this way, if you had to spend more to care for him, I will repay you whatever more you spent.' So, which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the thieves, Jesus asked? It was "The one who

showed mercy." It was the one who did something about the situation, who didn't avoid it, didn't walk on the other side of the road, who didn't pretend it didn't happen, or that he didn't see it, or who had more important things to attend to. It was the one who acted. Then Jesus said to the lawyer, "Go and do likewise."

We too must do more than offer our thoughts and prayers after this most recent mass shooting in this country that took the lives of 19 small children and two of their teachers, this time in Uvalde. We must do something. For there have been an average of one mass killing every day this year so far. It is a national disgrace. America has lost its way. O God, do not leave us comfortless.

The Second Amendment of our Constitution says nothing about the individual's right to bear arms, despite what the NRA has been peddling for decades on behalf of the gun-makers. Every Federal court decision on the Second Amendment for the first 235 years of this country confirmed that the Second Amendment dealt with the right of well-regulated state militias to bear arms, not individuals. It is only the current Supreme Court that has ruled otherwise. And in that ruling, one Supreme Court Justice dissented, writing that: "Historically, the new (American) government had no money to pay for an army, so they relied on the state militias. And the states required men to have certain

weapons in their home so that when they were called to do service as militiamen, they would have them. That was the entire purpose of the Second Amendment." Then Justice went on, "When we no longer need people to keep muskets in their home for our state militias, then the Second Amendment has no function. So, the Second Amendment is outdated in the sense that its function has become obsolete. The Second Amendment meant one thing when it was adopted, but under relentless pressure from the gun lobby, it has come to mean something else. Instead of concerning a young nation's need for a militia for self-defense, it has come to mean an alleged right of every citizen to own military firearms, not for hunting and feeding a family, not for defending one's home, but for killing other people, because that is the only thing an assault rifle is designed to do.

We have it in our intellectual and legal power to restore the original meaning of the Second Amendment and to adopt laws to manage access to firearms in a better way, to do something to change the situation. The vast majority of Americans approve of various 'common sense' gun restrictions. Even the majority of NRA members approve of complete background checks and the ending of straw purchases. So why don't we do something? Why? Our politicians are too eager to protect the gun industry which funds their campaigns so that those politicians can keep their power and prestige. But there is nothing evil, weak-kneed, or

un-American in our considering such changes. We need to do something.

Similarly, we have it in our power to change our attitudes toward violence in this country. Why, why is this a problem in America, but not in other civilized developed nations? There are actually more guns per capita in Canada than in the United States, but far, far less gun violence. Why? What we have to acknowledge about America is how deeply rooted we are in the mythology of the frontier: the Wild West, the lone hero, taking matters into his own hands. Other nations have different mythologies that inform their consciousness, but this one is ours, and we have to admit it, and we need to change it.

For mythologies can change. The world depicted by author Larry McMurtry in "Lonesome Dove" or Owen Wister in "The Oxbow Incident" ended a long time ago. The troubled young man carrying an assault rifle into an elementary school isn't Wyatt Earp reborn. He should never have been allowed to acquire such weapons at his age. He could not legally buy a beer, or a handgun even, but he could buy two assault rifles and 800 rounds of ammunition.

Behaviors can change. The church is about transformation. We aren't condemned to repeat tragic events in an endless loop of craziness and retribution. If we conclude that one mass shooting every day isn't the way we want our nation to exist,

then we have it in our power to take action, to do something. While there is no single simple button we can push to end gun violence in our nation, we can act. We can discuss freely, debate openly, consider many points of view respectfully, and then take some agreed action that will be effective. If our politicians won't discuss, debate, deliberate and act, then we need to elect better leaders, for the outlines of the necessary policy decisions are clear: limits on sales of military-style weapons and high-capacity magazines, effective background checks for all gun purchases, better access to mental health services, attention to gun trafficking, and liability insurance for gun owners.

Thus, I urge every one of us here today to add your voices to those clamoring for peace. I am not looking to take away anyone's right in this country to own a gun, but I am trying to save lives and avoid future tragedies and the deaths of innocent children. I want us to make a difference in the world. I want us to create a better place for our children and our grandchildren than we inherited. I want peace on earth and goodwill among mankind.

People of faith need to get beyond passivity and their fear of political action and do something. The "thoughts and prayers" we so eloquently offer in tragic times must lead us somewhere. God counts on us to take action and so we should. We could join

the good people of Moms Against God Violence, or the Newtown Action Alliance, or the Brady Campaign to End Gun Violence or Americans for Responsible Solutions, founded by Gabby Gifford. We need to be mindful of where our representatives in government stand on these issues, especially in this an election year. All of us need to be doing something to address this crisis in our country, to engage in something more than 'thoughts and prayers.' In a democracy, we need to make better decisions about whom we elect to public office and in what laws we seek to implement to govern our common life together and our public safety.

But simply calling for prayers after one more mass shooting just kicks the can down the road, and not in God's direction. We must be doing good works, we must take action, we must show mercy, and we must love our neighbor as ourselves, as we pray, Lord, make us instruments of thy peace. AMEN.