

WE SHOULD TRY TO BE GENTLE TOWARD OTHERS, AS JESUS HIMSELF WAS GENTLE.

Today, gentleness is not as highly regarded as it once was. There was a time when the best compliment you could pay someone was to call him or her a gentle person. Our word gentleman testifies to this.

Unfortunately, today violence is more popular than gentleness. TV has given violence widespread audience. This reality has taken its toll on us. Our own families reflect the violence of our age. We shout, kick things, throw things, and even strike one another.

How different from what Jesus taught us! "Learn from me" said Jesus, "because I am gentle and humble in spirit." The prophet Isaiah foretold the gentleness of Jesus when he said: "He will not shout or raise his voice or make loud speeches in the streets. He will not break off a bent reed nor put out a flickering lamp." (Isaiah 42:2-3)

A beautiful example of the gentleness of Jesus is the way he handled the case of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus was gentle not only with the woman but also with her self-righteous accusers. Jesus didn't shout and rave. He didn't scream and yell. He simply bent over, gently, and wrote in the sand with his finger. His action stood out like a clap of thunder in the silence of a summer's night.

Jesus taught us to be gentle, also. He held up for our imitation the shepherd in the Parable of the Lost Sheep. He didn't beat the sheep or drag it home. He placed it gently on his shoulders. Jesus also held up for our imitation the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The father didn't shout at his wayward son. He didn't hassle him; he hugged him.

Joseph Lahey tells this story of himself in Guideposts magazine. As a child, Joseph had a crippled back. His back didn't look so bad when he was dressed. But when he took his shirt off, it looked ugly. Joseph hated his back. One day he stood in line at school waiting to be

examined by the school doctor. He dreaded the moment when the doctor would say, "Remove your robe." Finally, the terrible moment came. Joseph fumbled with the cord. His hands were shaking badly. At last, the robe was off.

The doctor looked at him and then did something very unusual. He walked around the desk, cupped the boy's face in his big hands, and looked straight into the boy's eyes. "Son," he said gently, "do you believe in God?" "Yes, sir," said the boy. "Good!" said the doctor. "The more you believe in him, the more you believe in yourself." Then, just as suddenly as the doctor had shown this gentle side of his character, he reverted to being a businesslike doctor.

The doctor went back to the desk and wrote something on the chart. Then he left the room for a minute. Joe's eyes looked at the chart. He wondered what the doctor had written. Bracing himself for the worst, he inched forward to peek at the chart. Under the heading Physical Characteristics," the doctor had written: "Has an unusually well-shaped head." Joe couldn't believe his eyes. Soon the doctor returned.

He checked a few more things on Joe. Then he said with a knowing smile, "Okay, Joseph, you can put your robe back on. Please send me the next boy.

That brief episode in Joe's life took place years ago. But the boy never forgot the gentleness and the encouraging words of that doctor. Today's gospel contains an important invitation for all of us. It invites us to learn from Jesus because he is "gentle and humble in spirit." Concretely, what does this mean for us in the week ahead?

First, it means we try to respond to those who wrong us as Jesus did in the case of the sinful woman, and as the father did in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We try to respond with understanding. Second, it means we try to respond to people with burdens as the doctor did to the crippled boy. We try to respond with tender sensitivity. Welcome to the week of understanding and tender sensitivity.