

Ordinary 25C 2013
A Peaceful and Tranquil Life
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There are times when we hear the readings for mass, and they seem to say very little to us. And then there are other times, when a particular passage speaks clearly and directly to our situation. A case in point, I propose, is today's second reading, in which St. Paul writes to Timothy, "I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone ... that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity."

At another time, in a different situation, we might easily pass over this reading. But given the tragedy that occurred in our nation's capital this past week (the kind of senseless violence that is occurring all too often these days), St. Paul's words speak to our longing for something we seem to have lost: the ability to lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.

To be sure, our life was not perfectly quiet and tranquil before these awful events, and we have surely fallen short of the devotion and dignity of which Saint Paul speaks. But in the wake of this week's disaster—the kind of disaster that is becoming all too common in our own country—there is a sense that we have lost a peace and tranquility we can no longer regain. And so we wonder, will we ever rid ourselves of this scourge of violence? Will we ever be able to lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity?

When St. Paul wrote these words, his own life was anything but quiet and tranquil. He lived in a world controlled by the power and might of the Roman Empire, an empire built on force and violence. And as he was coming to the end of his missionary work, he faced the real prospect that the gospel he preached would lead to his death. More importantly, Paul knew and worried that the small Christian communities he nurtured might quickly disappear after his death. Nonetheless, with a confidence that only faith can give, he instructs Timothy to pray for all rulers, even the rulers of the Roman Empire, so that all people might lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.

Like Saint Paul, we find ourselves in an unsettling period of violence and strife. At a time like this there is a seductive temptation to turn in and

upon ourselves and to let the violence of such senseless events overwhelm us. But this is not the response of the faith and hope we profess. An attitude of defeat and pessimism must never be the response of those who believe in Christ. An attitude that the power of evil is stronger than the power of good is contrary to the gospel we profess.

Our faith teaches us, as Saint Paul writes in today's reading, that God wills *everyone* to be saved. Our faith teaches us that Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for *all*. This is why we offer prayers of petition every day for peace built on justice. This is why we ask God to grant us a quiet and tranquil life. This is why we seek to live with devotion and dignity. This is why we work as well as pray for peace built on justice.

There is no simple answer that will end the senseless violence that afflicts us these days, but I know this: such violence is not part of God's plan for our salvation. I know this: God so loved the world that his only Son suffered the violence of the cross for our salvation. I know this: we must not allow our lives to become overcome by such senseless violence.