



Thieves are rarely recognized as thieves.

Often they live among us appearing as friends, telling us what we want to hear, showing us what we want to see and pointing the finger of blame at those who are different or perceived as “not belonging.” And always, always, they flirt with truth.

Thieves look for the easy way out: simple solutions and easy answers. Most often they evoke a sense of fear and a longing to return to “days of yore.”

Who might the marauders be in our midst? Do you suppose they might be ideas or concepts or opinions that rob us of our authentic Catholic sense of the world? A sense that indeed we are our sisters and our brothers “keepers.” That we all must bear the burden and the opportunity to care for the “other,” and listen, listen.

Are they “temptations” to abandon our embrace of those in need, to turn from our Catholic “fundamental option for the poor, the lost, the disenfranchised?”

Are they “strangers” who would lead us away by “climbing over” our Catholic sense of respect for **all life**, from beginning to end—or attempt to use God’s word to justify hatred, war and separation?

Are they those who seek to persuade us that violence, in the face of violence, is the solution, in our world, nation and in our own homes? Or that there can be peace without justice or justice without reconciliation? Or that “insult should be met with insult,” or that suffering should lead to threats? Are there robbers, clothed in false garments, who seek to “dominate,” rather than “encounter.” Are there thieves among us who climb over the fence of truth and faith, kindness and justice? Are they those who choose “*diatribe*” over “*dialogue*” or “*destruction over diplomacy*?” Are they those “*who have climbed in some other way*,” who want us to believe that there can be justice without true worship and worship without true justice? Are they the ones who tell us that we can eat and drink at the altar of Christ and not question the structures of our world or nation that create poverty, violence, war, death, unemployment, sickness, hunger, poverty, hatred, fear, terror, and racism? Or that we bear no responsibility for the suffering beyond our borders?

Or tell us that what we do, say, pray and sing here should not shape how we are to live, act and believe in the rest of our lives? Or tell us to separate politics from virtue, or compassion from power, worship from reality?

Do we grasp what Christ is trying to tell us about the world in which we and all others live, when we eat and drink at his table?

Whose voice do you and I recognize? Who do you follow? To whom do I belong? The thief and the robber, remember, come “*only to steal, lie, slaughter and destroy.*”

Christ comes that we might have life—all of us, every one of us, and have it to the full. Christ comes, through the storms of history and life, and stands in the middle of it all. He comes, though, not just for us, but for all, especially and particularly for those who are blamed, different,” shunned,

silenced, sent away. He comes for all the victims of "those who have power to unleash wars" and a so-called "peace imposed by force." He comes for all, never just for some, "to guide us in right paths... and to give us courage."

Christ, here in this place, is the gateway of genuine life and compassionate mercy; the entrance into the place of hope, service, holy communion, and faith. The place where truth must be told, life must be honored, where wounds must be seen and named. The place thieves and robbers are exposed.

The words of the Gospel, living and true, are often a scandal to the accepted ways of the times in which we live, especially when they are words which "cut to heart," when applied to realities of today, and speak of life in abundance for all, not just for some or the few, or the strong.

Words which come to life *"in the table spread before us in the sight of every foe,"* in a loaf of bread—*real* bread, broken. and a cup of wine, *real* wine, poured out for mercy, enough for "the many,"

not just enough for the "chosen" few. Real, because we live in the real world—where real lives are broken and real blood is poured out. Nourishment for *"courage."*

Come, enter through the open gate to the place "beauty is born anew;" To the place life, all of life, everyone's life, is both loved and served from beginning to end. The house where the words are believed and lived: ***"I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."*** ***"Only goodness and kindness follow me."***

In the words of Pope Leo: *"Do not be afraid. Be sprouts of peace where the seed of hatred and resentment is growing; be weavers of unity where polarization and enmity prevail; be the voice of those who have no voice to ask for justice and dignity; be light and salt where the flame of faith and the taste for life are fading."* Choose peace, through dialogue, not by domination, but by encounter. Pope Leo XIV

THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD.

HE GUIDES US IN THE RIGHT PATHS...

