

June 4, 2008
Wednesday of the Ninth Week in Ordinary Time

Readings of the day may be found on the following link:

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab>

2 Timothy 1:1-3, 6-12

Psalms 123:1b-2ab, 2cdef

Mark 12:18-27

For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands. ☐For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.

Jesus said to them, "Are you not misled because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?"

I am not sure why, but as I prayed with today's readings, the memory of an incident of many years ago returned to me. I was a young adult, newly married, and working as a social worker for a local Catholic social service agency. My husband and I were leaving church after the Sunday evening Mass when we came upon a father verbally attacking his son for his misbehavior and, while not physically abusing him, shoving him around quite a bit. My husband wanted to intervene, but I cautioned him, using the rationale that if we interfered it could make it worse for this child when they were in the privacy of their home. I knew the father's behavior did not meet the definition of child abuse that called for legal action, but what I did not realize that day, was that, while it did not meet the criteria for legal intervention, it met the criteria for compassionate intervention. Compassion, as Henri Nouwen, in his book by that same name, tells us, holds within it the necessity to confront and challenge all that is not of God. I look back at that incident and I wonder what it did to that little boy that no one took a stand against his father's behavior. I wonder if he grew up to respond to his children in the same way. I wonder if it caused him to give up hope that the world is a good and safe place to live. I wonder what life lesson we all learned as we walked by in silence. As I write this, I recall the incident in New York city many years ago. A young woman was assaulted and beaten as tenants watched from their apartment window and did nothing. I was not there that night, but I was on a street in another town one evening witnessing a less severe but equally hateful act and did nothing. I think of this in light of today's reading and realize how much I did not know about what the gospel asks of us, about what Jesus' life was really about, or what God really intended for us. And it calls me and challenges me to keep alert so I might live in the power of love rather than the spirit of cowardice.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.
Edmund Burke