

**08/28/16 ..... 22C**

--Politically speaking, President Obama and South Carolina Senator Tim Scott have very little in common. The president is a Democrat, and Senator Scott is a Republican. They disagree on most major issues.

-- But both men are Black (and within a few years of each other in age). And they both have experienced what some would call harassment from law enforcement officials. I'm sure my brother-in-law Ralph could relate to their experience, especially being stopped for "driving while black."

-- Fortunately, all of them handled these incidents with an adult patience. This weekend, we are being asked to reflect on the spiritual work of mercy: *to bear wrongs patiently*.

-- And God's word today, particularly the gospel, warns us against asserting ourselves too aggressively, as if every small right is equally important and every insult must be answered.

-- Of course, there is a danger in telling people to bear wrongs patiently, if by that we mean that we should never speak out against injustice. E.g., No one should tell workers that they should simply accept slave wages, especially if they are productive workers.

-- And we shouldn't shy away from tackling honestly the issue of the relationship of police to the communities they serve. We need to work at deescalating tensions where those are present.

-- But we should do all of this with an attitude of patience and hope. That is the example Martin Luther King set as he worked against racial injustice while enduring arrest and assault and death threats.

-- We know by experience that responding in kind to every hurtful remark thrown our way does not work well. Sometimes we have to let the remark go or even take it with a little sense of humor.

-- Such an attitude reflects the humility commended by the author of Sirach, the wisdom book from which we have our first reading. For sad

experience tells us that answering a cutting remark with an angry response typically escalates the tension in a situation.

-- We've even seen this in political campaigns. Candidates who respond to every real or perceived insult with anger usually drop in popularity. People are suspicious of people with such thin skin, so to speak.

-- As followers of Christ, though, there is much more than a pragmatic reason to bear such wrongs patiently. For we follow a Savior who did not fight back against those who insulted him. He did not even resist those who brought him to his cross.

-- Jesus was no "doormat." Jesus maintained his dignity despite many insults. In turning the other cheek, he exposed the indignity of those who were persecuting him.

-- Today, many Christians (and devout people of other faiths) endure similar persecutions for remaining faithful to their beliefs. Some have done so for many years. We keep them in our prayers as we pray for justice, safety and dignity for them.

-- And we ask for the strength to bear the much smaller indignities we have to put up with in our own lives. For we know that Christ bore much more for our sake.

-- Yes, we are called to work against injustice. But we are also called to patient forbearance. Jesus himself showed us how the two go hand in hand.