Reflection for 16th October: Non-violence. Parable of the persistent widow.

All of us have been, at some point in our lives, violent in our attitudes, gestures, words and actions. Do you agree? Disagree? Strongly agree? Strongly disagree?

The unjust judge gave the widow what she was demanding out of fear that he was pushing her over the edge and she would become violent to him. Is this how you get your needs met? By threatening people? Indeed you may be so accustomed to behaving in a particular way that you are unaware of it’s violent undertones.

Here in middle England I don’t suppose we see ourselves as inherently violent, racist, or bigoted. We are polite after all; as the song says, ‘no one knows what goes on behind closed doors.’ How much more what goes on in our minds.

All of us have been, at some point in our lives, violent in our attitudes, gestures, words and actions; maybe like the widow in the Gospel, if pushed too far we react with violence.

A non-violent approach to all of life’s situations demands that we are attentive to our attitudes, so that our gestures, words and actions do not lead us into violent behavior.

It is knowing the difference between reacting and responding. When we react we lose our temper; when we respond we take time to listen; to seek understanding.

Paul, in his instruction to Timothy, and the early Christian community says at the end of the reading, ‘as for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.’

Jeremiah, in the first reading today reminds us that the covenant with God is written in our hearts; in the pew-sheet today I quote what people have been saying about non-violence throughout the ages. Please follow it with me as I read in aloud, after which I will invite you to read aloud the one that struck you. (please see below)

At some point in our lives we must choose non-violence as our way of being in the world.

What Peacemakers have said throughout History

* Lord make me an instrument of your peace, Francis of Assisi.
* I will not permit any person to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him, Booker Washington.
* When I am angry I have the right to be angry but that does not give me the right to be cruel, Anon
* The first duty of love is to listen, Paul Tillach
* Anyone can become angry, that**’**s easy. To be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way, is not easy, Aristotle
* This is a cause for which I am prepared to die, but there is no more a cause for which I will be prepared to kill, Gandhi
* Hope, not anger must direct non-violet approaches, moreover, that hope in the power of the resurrection is not a feeling or a mood, it is a necessary choice of survival, William Stringfellow
* The habit of love, like all habits is something we learn, Mother Teresa
* The Reign of God depends on God; What we can do is speak for life, offer hope and be to be led where God wants us to go, Michelle Balek O.S.F
* All shall be well, all things shall be well, all manner of things shall be well, Julian of Norwich
* How does non-violet love become the foundation of our lives? Prayer, meditation, simplicity of life, service to others, especially the poor; non-violent actions against injustice, building of human community, a commitment not to harm any living things. Michelle Balek O.S.F
* The way to change minds is with affection not anger, Dalai Lama
* Love in action is a harsh dreadful thing, compared to love in dreams, Doris Day
* If you don**’**t find God in the very next person you meet, it is a waste of time to look for God any further, Gandhi
* Do not let the sun go down on your anger, St Paul
* You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist, Indira Gandhi