

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 15, 2017
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Several years back, there was a very popular television show called The Wonder Years. The show revolved around a young boy named Kevin growing up at the end of the 1960's and very early 1970's. Kevin was a normal boy from a middle class family experiencing normal neighborhood life with his friends and pining for a girl down the street by the name of Winnie Cooper.

The show spoke to me because I could easily insert myself into the role of Kevin. I was about his age during the time period portrayed in the show. I remember riding my green Schwinn Stingray with the high handle bars and banana seat through our neighborhood and, of course, we all had a Winnie Cooper to pine for.

I'm sure – like me – that show brought back a lot of memories for many of you as well. I can remember sitting at those cheap metal TV trays, enjoying Swanson frozen TV dinners out of the oven (yes, the oven – not the microwave) while gathered around the television watching the evening news with Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley and Chet Huntley as images of young men dying in Vietnam flashed across the screen, or African-American families marching throughout the South and I can even remember the day 4 students were killed and 9 more injured at Kent State – not too far up the road from where we now sit.

As wonderful as that show was, the time it portrayed was a tumultuous one. It was a time of division and violence; war and bloodshed; anger and civil unrest. It was a time of the so-called “hippie movement,” bohemia, and sit-ins. But, it was also a time of change.

But, what I remember the most about that time was the music. Not the rock and roll or early soul music but the Folk Music that I have grown to appreciate and truly love throughout the years. Yes, it is filled with words of protest, but also words of hope, words of peace, and words of love for our fellow man.

The Folk Music of the day catalogued and even evoked the changing times; both our need for change and conversion of our daily lives. It wasn't about the singer or songwriter... it was about the message - their lyrics calling us to action; their words leading us to change a society – a way of thinking about our brothers and sisters.

The music of that day got us through war, through 3 very emotional assassinations, - and of course - through the civil rights movement. It was a tough time but we got through it and are better off because of it; thanks in no small part to the message of the folk music evangelists of the day.

In some ways, I have to wonder if we don't need to have a similar movement today to counteract the violence and horrors of our present day society and raise awareness of poverty and injustices faced in today's world.

[Now I do understand that those of you who are a little older than me might disagree slightly with my "starry-eyed" views of that time but I am not here to debate the politics of the 1960s and 70s. Those of you who are younger than me might not relate to my love of this music. To you, I say Google the great folk songs of the time – but PLEASE not during the homily.]

And so it is when I think of John the Baptist who had to have been the world's first hippie - living in his own "little commune" in the desert; dressed in camel hair and eating only organic foods offered by nature - his anti-establishment views at the ready; his message of change and repentance at the forefront.

Like the folk singers of the 60's, St. John never made it about himself but for him, it was always about the message. And he put his message into action while protesting the current day's ways - He challenged the thoughts of the day; the hypocritical established ways of the Pharisees and of the government - and he promoted change.

His message was simple – one was coming who would baptize us in love. In fact, in John (The Evangelist's) gospel – from where today's passage comes - Jesus gives us only one command – "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another."

Our conversion begins with our baptism but then becomes deeper and richer every time we open up ourselves to the Holy Spirit – individually or as a society. It becomes deeper and richer as we experience the sacramental life of the church as we will in a few moments when we receive the body and blood of Christ.

And, it's important to believe that our conversion becomes even deeper and richer with every loss, with every hardship, with every trial we face in our daily lives because it's during these times - if we accept God's grace – we come to know his plan for our lives.

So, throughout this New Year, let us be a people who – like John - send out a message of change; of conversion; a message of peace and of love. And if we can't be a people who do this throughout the entire year, then let us commit to being a people who do it for only a month and if we can't for a month, then let us commit to just this week and still – if not this week then send out a message of love today... and if we have to, let us even use words.