



WAS JESUS MEEK? Was Mary meek? More fundamentally, do we want to think of either of them as being meek?

Let's be frank, meekness is not regarded as a virtue by our society. The issue, however, might be how we define or imagine what it is to be meek.

Franz Jägerstätter was an Austrian farmer who his neighbors probably regarded as meek. He didn't call attention to himself. He tended his farm and loved his wife and daughter. When the Germans invaded Austria, he did his best to pretend it didn't matter. But then he was drafted and joining the army demanded he pledge his fidelity to Adolf Hitler. He refused. There were no public pronouncements or noisy demonstrations. His silent resistance and the execution that would result, he was told, would be totally meaningless. No one would know, he was told. Why not just go along? And live!

This seemingly meek farmer was killed by a firing squad in 1943 and beatified 64 years later by Pope Benedict XVI. A rich inheritance to be sure.

Meekness is misunderstood. The meek are not likely to be blowhards, notorious self-promoters or scene-stealers. They're not going to be throwing temper tantrums. At the same time, meekness is far more complicated than being shy or introverted. It is not a matter of weakness, and certainly the courage and resolve of Franz Jägerstätter is

proof of that.

Rather, the meek have refined the discipline of controlled strength. They don't give in to anger, they know when and how to respond appropriately,

rash judgment," she wrote. "We must turn the other cheek, give up our cloak, go a second mile."

This blessing of meekness, of controlled strength, is prominent in the non-violent witness and words of our civil rights heroes. Consider this Christmas sermon preached by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1957:

"To our most bitter opponents we say: 'We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory.'"

And, thus, the meek shall inherit the land. **TL**



they are not going to hesitate in saying the right thing at the right time.

This understanding reminds me of a priest with whom I served on a diocesan board. We would have long, tedious meetings and conversations would occasionally be intense, wide-ranging and sometimes rather pointless. While a few of us were often the first and frequent in addressing a topic, this priest would often be the last to speak, even when it seemed the discussion had run its course and the issue resolved. But, while several of us had been opining and quickly jumping to conclusions, he was listening and thinking. His controlled strength and thoughtful observation was invaluable.

Was Jesus meek? Dorothy Day once observed that he was in that he was not interested in promoting himself. Was Mary meek? She said herself that she was the handmaid of the Lord. It's such meekness that Dorothy Day says every Christian must pursue. "Yes, we must be meek, bear injustice, malice,