

## 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

**The fruit of righteousness is sewn in peace for those who cultivate peace**

*" We don't come to the monastery to get away from suffering;  
we come to hold the suffering of the world, no longer focused  
only on our own personal salvation "*

Last weekend, I was invited to lead a retreat near Oregon City for a group of people from around the northwest called Christian Life Community. I used to work with this community as a spiritual guide. Christian Life Community (CLC) is a world-wide lay faith community inspired by the Ignatian Spirituality of the Jesuits to minister to the needs of others and support them in finding God in all things, the mission of the Jesuits.

*" Finding God in All Things "* was the theme of this retreat. We replaced it with the more compelling theme, *" Being Seized by God in All Things. "* It is not about our finding God, it is about God manifesting God's Self to us.

An awareness of the pain each was carrying about the pain in our Church soon surfaced. As we continued to pray over it, there was a perceptible shift from the pain we felt as individuals to the pain we felt as a community. This surprised us. Our vision became bigger, our experience became larger, and our compassion and forgiveness became stronger. We felt we were having an experience of church, what church is meant to be - not just a place where individuals come to seek personal salvation, but a coming together of people seeking each other's salvation in love and support.

Thomas Merton writes, *" We don't come to the monastery to get away from suffering; we come to hold the suffering of the world where we are no longer focused only on - what Merton calls - our own personal salvation project. "* In other words, we don't go to Church to escape the suffering of the world, we go to Church to hold the suffering of the world. The Hebrew Scriptures speak of a people who found God in the seemingly secular and mundane, what most of us would describe as our problems—the negative and the hurtful. But these - our sufferings - become channels through which Divine Love flows into us.

Isn't this the meaning of Eucharist? What Jesus did when facing his final trial was to have dinner with his friends. They were all hurting and afraid, and yet it was in his reaching out to them during that terrifying night that not only gave the support and strength they needed, it was in doing so that Jesus found his own. They didn't come together to distance themselves from the pain; it was in their coming together that they were able to hold each other's pain and eventually our own.

Isn't this what we just heard the Letter of James say: "*Beloved: where jealousy and selfish ambition do not exist, there is an order and every good practice. The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.*"

Our church is hurting, and so are we. It is not in our blaming and condemning each other that forgiveness and healing can happen, it is in our coming together in companionship and good will that we find justice in our forgiveness and healing.

A Jesuit who worked in Zambia once described to me how the Zambian people resolved the hurt and pain they experienced from each other's tribe. They would come together for three days of feasting and dancing before they sat down to discuss their conflict. By that time, their anger and hurt had dissipated, and they came together in peace even before they held council.

In Hawaii, there was a practice of forgiveness and healing among the native peoples that would serve as a good model for being Church. When a family member was in any kind of serious difficulty - illness, victim or perpetrator of crime, victim of a natural disaster, the whole family or tribe would gather around the person and silently search their own hearts for whatever role they may have played in this person's suffering. When they came to an understanding, they would silently say, "*I care about You*" "*I am Sorry*" "*Please Forgive Me*" "*Thank You*" and then leave the circle. Eventually all that was left was one healed individual. What lovely experiences of our Sacrament of Reconciliation.

What is the model of Church that we work out of - you and me? Is it the place where we go to fulfill our obligations? That is good, but is that big enough? Is it the place we go to anesthetize our pain? That is good, but is that big enough? Or is it the place where we find ourselves seized by God, not as an individuals but in community with others - that place where we encounter God, not as individuals, but as a community?

We become Church when we come together and share with each other how we have experienced, or perhaps not experienced, God in our lives - in good times and in bad. When we share our stories of faith with each other, we discover how much we are one in Christ -

and how much lessened is our inclination to blame and condemn others - as we seek to heal the pain of our church and the world in loving justice. Who can resist such a church.

I find much of this Spirit here in St. Mary by the Sea - a welcoming presence among the people here to all who come, loving and supporting them to feel seized by God to love and support each other, including those who cause us harm.

Let us feast and dance for three days before confronting those who are hurting us; let us say to those we have hurt: "*I care about You*" - "*I am sorry*" - "*Please forgive me for hurting you*"

"*Thank You.*" Could there be anyone who could resist such a church as that