

2nd Sunday of Easter

Bring your hand and feel the place of the nails, and do not be unbelieving but believing

God is on the side of the pain, and goes wherever the pain is

The Upper Room

The disciples in the upper room were broken, they had hit bottom. They didn't realize it, but that was perhaps the time they were most disposed to hear Jesus' voice. They probably thought they did during his entry into Jerusalem, but there were too many other voices drowning out his - success, privilege, power. A lot of what they were hearing was their own voices.

We hear Jesus most clearly when there are no other voice getting in the way, especially our own. This happens mostly when everything around us seems to have failed.

A Meditation

I would like to invite you now to listen to a meditation I put together from a couple sources, one being Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM:

“In the Gospels, we clearly see that it's mostly the lame, the poor, the blind, the prostitutes, the drunkards, the tax collectors, the sinners--those on the bottom and the outside--who really hear Jesus' teaching, get the point and respond to him. It's the leaders and insiders (the priests, scribes, Pharisees, teachers of the law, the Roman leaders) who crucify him.

“The first Christians lived from the bottom as outcasts - in the catacombs. The turning point at which the Church moved to the top is the year 313 A.D. when Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire. The Church's interests became linked with Imperial Interests; its view moved “*from the bottom*” (the persecuted, the outsiders) to “*the top*” where it became the Ultimate Insider (power, money, status, and control).

“In all honesty, once it was on top and fully part of “the establishment,” the Church became a bit embarrassed by the powerless one, Jesus. We had to make his obvious defeat into a glorious victory that had nothing to do with defeat--his or ours. Let's face it, we feel more comfortable with power than with powerlessness. Who wants to be like Jesus on the cross, the very icon of powerlessness? But then we hear Mary's "Magnificat" in which she subversively says that God "*brings down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly*" (Luke 1:52)

“We Christians are such a strange religion! We worship this naked, bleeding loser, crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem, but we work to be winners, powerful, and on top. One of the most powerful ways to see Jesus’ preference for the poor is by moving outside of our own success system, whatever it is, and enter into some form of lifestyle solidarity with the powerless.

“When we are too smug and content, we really have little need for the Gospel, so we make Christianity into pious devotions that ask nothing of us and do nothing for the world. We are never in need of forgiveness because we have constructed a world that allows us to always be right and "normal." We are highly insulated from the human situation. When we are self-sufficient, our religion will become corrupt because it doesn't understand the Mystery of how divine life is transferred, how people change, how life flows, how we become something more, and how we fall into the great compassion.

“Only vulnerable people change. Only vulnerable people change others. Jesus presented us with an icon of absolute vulnerability, and said, *"Gaze on this until you get the point. Gaze on this until you know what God is like!"* That demanded too much of us, so we made the cross instead into a juridical transaction between Jesus and God (*"substitutionary atonement theory"*), which in great part robbed the cross of its deep transformative power. After centuries of legalistic religion, sacraments were administered in a juridical fashion. The very word *"mercy"* seems a foreign concept.

“It has been said that religion is largely filled with people who are afraid of hell, and spirituality is for people who have gone through hell. As all initiation rites say in one way or another: *you have to die before you die*, and then you know. Jesus is always on the side of the crucified ones. He is just as loyal to the suffering of middle-eastern soldiers as he is to the suffering of western soldiers. He grabs all our boundaries away from us, and suddenly we are forced to see that we are a universal people. Most people do not like being that exposed and that shared. Yes, God is on the side of the pain, and goes wherever the pain is. We can no longer preempt Jesus for our own group, religion, or country. People seeking power cannot use him for their private purposes. He belongs to the powerless.

“A lawyer who joined the Catholic Church and then became a Franciscan said to me one day, *"You know, this Church is harder and harder for me to understand. We claim to have the perfect medicine, the healing power to restore and renew hearts and souls, but we seem to say in the same breath, 'But make sure you don't really need it! Because if you really need it, you are a less than ideal member!'"*

“Forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, and healing are commonly seen as mere concessions, carefully doled out to those unfortunate sinners and outsiders, instead of the very path of salvation itself. Thank God, we live in a time where we have a Pope who is shouting mercy from the housetops--for everybody who needs it and wants it. But some of us, including some of us priests, bishops and cardinals, are very stingy and regulatory in handing it on to others. What does not come around, does not go around, it seems.”

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It was when the disciples felt hopeless in the upper room that they were most able to hear his voice. It is when we feel hopeless in our upper rooms that we are able to hear his voice.

We hear Jesus' voice

- † when we stop complaining about how life is treating us and ask how we are treating life
- † when we stop making Christianity into a set of pious devotions that asks nothing of us and does nothing for the world

We hear Jesus' voice

- † when we stop preempting Jesus only for our own group, our own religion, or own country to the exclusion of others
- † when we stop constructing worlds where we are always right and never have to ask for forgiveness

We hear Jesus' voice

- † when we stop linking church interests with male privilege and clerical status and recognize instead that the words and works of the Holy Spirit are carried out equally through the priesthood of all women and men in the church.

This is Easter Season

We are not celebrating Easter because Jesus is over his pain, we are celebrating Easter because Jesus is showing us that love is stronger than hate, that life is stronger than death.

We are celebrating Easter, not because it takes us past our pain, we are celebrating Easter because Jesus has shown us that love is stronger than hate, that life is stronger than death

God is on the side of the pain, and goes wherever the pain is.

Let us not be afraid to feel his nails in our hands because it is there that we will discover how true it is what Jesus is saying, that:

It is much better to stop unbelieving, and believe!

Thank you, God!

No wonder Easter Season is filled with

ALLELUJAH!