

January 18, 2015

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

**"Where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."
So they went and saw where Jesus was staying. (Gospel)**

Every tear brings the Messiah closer

The Question

Has there ever been a more frequently asked question than, "Lord where are you"? What is it that prompts us to ask this question? It's clearly more than intellectual curiosity.

The Response

I read a commentary this past week on today's readings. It is by Oblate Fr. Ronald Rolheizer, one of the leading Catholic spiritual teachers today. His response to why the question, "Lord, where are you?" is asked so often is that it comes from people who are suffering. This is an excerpt from his commentary.

"People are always impatient, but God is never in a hurry!" These words by Nikos Kazantzakis highlight an important truth: the need to be patient with God and let things unfold in "God's time". We are always longing for a messiah to take away our pain and to avenge oppression, but mostly those prayers seem to fall on deaf ears.

Religious history through the centuries confirms this. There is a constant, painful cry in scripture: 'Come, Lord, come! Save us! How much longer must we wait? When, Lord, when?' We are forever impatient, but God refuses to be hurried. Why is God, seemingly, so slow to act? Why does God seem so excruciatingly slow to act in the face of human impatience?

There is a line in Jewish apocalyptic literature that reads: 'Every tear brings the messiah closer!' There it is. It would appear that there is an intrinsic connection between frustration and the messiah coming closer. It seems that deliverance can only be born after a long period of human yearning, like Jesus' birth. Real love and life can only be born after a long-suffering patience has created the correct space, the womb, within which the sublime can be born.

John of the Cross uses the metaphor of a log bursting into flame only after it has first dried out. It lies in the fire and sizzles until it reaches kindling temperature, and then it ignites and bursts into flame.

This is the dynamic of how real love is born. We ignite into love only after we self-centered, green, damp logs have sizzled sufficiently. The fire that makes us sizzle is unfulfilled desire. Sometimes we have to be brought to a high fever through frustration and pain before we are willing to let go of our self-centeredness, and let ourselves be drawn into relationship.

*The contemporary Czech priest and scholar, **Thomas Halik**, once commented that Messiahs can only be born inside a particular kind of womb, one within which there's enough patience and willingness to wait to let things happen on God's terms, not ours.*

Ideally, every tear should bring the messiah closer. Every frustration should make us more ready to love. Every tear should make us more ready to forgive. Every heartache should make us more ready to let go of some of our separateness. Every unfulfilled longing should lead us into deeper and more sincere prayer. All of our pained impatience for consummation that seems to forever elude us should, ideally, make us feverish enough to burst into love's flame. The Messiah comes closer if we have the patience to wait."

Wait

Poetry has a way of expressing things in a way our minds can't. I give as an example a poem that was in JIVAN, the Jesuit Newsletter in India of January, 2011. It is called, "Wait".

*Desperately, helplessly, longingly, I cried;
Quietly, patiently, lovingly, God replied.
I pled and I wept for a clue to my fate . . .
And the Master so gently said, "Wait."*

*"Wait? You say wait?" my indignant reply.
Lord, I need answers, I need to know why!
Is your hand shortened? Or have you not heard?
By faith I have asked, and I'm claiming your Word.*

*My future and all to which I relate,
Hangs in the balance, and you tell me to Wait?
I'm needing a 'yes,' a go-ahead sign.
Or even a 'no,' to which I'll resign.*

*You promised, dear Lord, that if we believe,
We need but to ask, and we shall receive.
Lord, I've been asking, and this is my cry;
I'm weary of asking! I need a reply.*

*Then quietly, softly, I learned of my fate,
As my Master replied to me again, "Wait."
So I slumped in my chair, defeated and taut,
And grumbled to God, "So, I'm waiting - waiting for what?"*

*God seemed to kneel, and His eyes met with mine
And He tenderly said, I could give you a sign.
I could shake the heavens and darken the sun.*

I could raise the dead and cause mountains to run.

*I could give all you seek and pleased you would be.
You'd have what you want, but you wouldn't know Me.
You'd not know the depth of My love for each saint.
You'd not know the power I give to the faint.*

*You'd not learn to see through clouds of despair;
You'd not learn to trust just by knowing I'm there.
You'd not know the joy of resting in me,
When darkness and silence are all you can see.*

*You'd never know should your pain quickly flee,
What it means that My grace is sufficient for thee.
Yes, your dearest dreams overnight would come true,
But oh the loss if you lost what I'm doing in you.*

*So be silent, my child, and in time you will see,
That the greatest of gifts is to truly to know me.
And though oft My answers seem terribly late,
My most precious answer of all is simply to "WAIT."*

What is all this Saying?

This is saying that the Messiah is revealed to those who are in the midst of suffering and oppression, that the Messiah comes closer in our long-suffering. The Messiah doesn't bring suffering, we're going to undergo it anyway. But it's as Jesus says, the Messiah will make our suffering light and our burdens sweet.

Again, Fr. Rolheizer: *"Every frustration ideally should make us more ready to love. Every tear ideally should make us more ready to forgive. Every heartache ideally should make us more ready to let go of our separateness. Every unfulfilled longing ideally should lead us into deeper and more sincere prayer. Every tear brings the Messiah closer. It seems that deliverance is only born after a long period of human yearning, like Jesus' birth."*

So, where does Christ live?

Christ lives in the midst of human suffering and longing. As G.K. Chesterton says, *"God whispers in joy and shouts in pain."* Every tear brings the Messiah closer.

**Where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."
So they went and saw where Jesus was staying.**