

January 25, 2015

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

**“I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.
For the world in its present form is passing away.” (I, Cor.)**

*We know, Lord, that you have come! We no longer have to wait
because you are always with us both in our sorrows and in our joys*

For the world in its present form is passing away

“*The world is passing a way in its present form?*” It certainly feels like that. Just watch the news. It’s mostly about tragedies, mistakes, and what is wrong. News broadcasts practically obsess over what is wrong. Ever notice that? They never lets up, not just in covering all the suffering that it can, but in repeating the same over and over. My practice is to turn the news off once I have heard the headlines, otherwise, it will just drag me down. It’s so easy to lose hope; it sometimes feels like God has abandoned us.

Last week, we recalled that constant and painful cry throughout scripture: “*Come, Lord, come! Save us! How much longer must we wait? When, Lord, when?*” We considered that such the cry does not necessarily indicate that something has gone wrong. In fact, quite the opposite. Suffering indicates that the heart is actually being opened to something more, something greater - God. It’s like God is hovering over us, watching, looking for an opening to come into our hearts. And when this happens, it hurts, because God is stretching the heart to make room for God’s Self. It means letting go of the familiar, the comfortable, for the unknown, and this hurts. It hurts to let go of what we are hanging on to and to allow ourselves to be taken to we know not where. Nothing is going wrong. Quite the opposite, something wonderful is happening. We are being taken deeper into the life and heart of God, and once we get there, we won’t want to go back to where we were before. It’s Emmanuel, God who is always with us, and there isn’t a thing we can do about it.

So how do we view God in the face of death - demons - fears - worries - hell all around us? By widening the frame through which we look at life. Seeing the bigger picture helps us see that there is more to life than pain, that Christ is never absent from us but is in fact rejoicing and suffering with us in our rejoicing and suffering. This changes everything. Suffering doesn’t separate us from Christ, suffering alerts us to what is separating us from God. This is the bigger picture. No wonder Christianity spread so quickly in the ancient Roman world, it gave meaning and hope to the people’s lives. Our lives are about following Jesus.

Follow Me

So what does following Jesus involve? Jesuit Fr. John Kavanaugh from St. Louis University wrote a commentary on the scripture we are considering for today. I'd like to share some of that with you.

"It is a common misunderstanding to expect that the experience of God is somehow always laced with peace, charged with happiness, and results in victory. Most instances in the scriptures suggest otherwise. Many prophets, even Moses, regretted at times trying to follow God. Jonah had this problem. He was invested into announcing the message that God was going to destroy the city of Nineveh. But God forgave the people, and Jonah was enraged and embarrassed. He regretted not being able to carry out God's threat. The same with the apostles. They thought following Jesus would be smooth sailing, that things would be free and clear. And yet, we know the frustration and failure they felt in following him. We are all pilgrims, prophets, apostles in this passing world. Following Jesus is not without its surprises.

"Soren Kierkegaard once said that what Jesus wants is followers, not admirers. To admire Jesus without letting that change our lives does nothing for him or us. We follow him by imitating him. This is unlike the "Jesus people" of the late 1960's with their rather raw, literal approach to following Jesus. They tried to look like he looked. They put on flowing white robes, grew beards, walked bare-foot, and tried, in appearance and dress, to imitate the Jesus that centuries of Western artists have painted for us.

"This is not following Christ. We follow him, not just by doing what he did, but by taking on his attitudes and his values. John of the Cross, the great Spanish mystic, says we imitate Jesus when we imitate his motivation, when we try to do things for the same reasons he did, when we pray to feel the way he felt. Sometimes we are filled with a passion for goodness and a warm sense of God's presence. At other times, we feel sterile, dispassionate, spiritually dry and wonder: *"What's wrong? How did I lose the way?"*

"John of the Cross assures us that nothing has gone wrong. Rather our prayer is being answered. We pray to feel like Jesus felt, and he grants our request - by our sometimes being buoyed up by fervent feelings as he was, and at other times feeling sterile as he also did. Christ in other words is sharing in our fervor and in our dryness.

Putting on Christ - Christ putting on us

The bigger picture shows us that Christ is actually suffering and rejoicing with us, that Christ does not come down from the cross to help us in our suffering, but instead lifts us up to the level of the cross to participate in his. Now our suffering takes on the meaning of his; now we see and understand life the way he does. This is putting on Christ, and when we do, we will find that we will no longer:

- † lose our inner peace in the face of violence and distress
- † feel abandoned by God in times of spiritual dryness
- † fear that God has abandoned us when we are afraid
- † let ourselves be discouraged by bad news and angry reporting

- † allow a split to develop between our politics and our faith
 - † look the other way when we see poverty in our country
 - † blindly seek the short term benefits of fossil fuel energy when scientists around the world are increasingly warning us that this is leading to the annihilation of life on our planet
- (1) this is seeing the bigger picture
 - (2) this is putting on Christ

Francis in a recent homily observed, *“The journey of faith always begins a little selfishly, seeking from God healing or help with a problem, but Christian maturity allows one to be purified and to arrive at the point of recognizing Christ. Then we will feel the Holy Spirit moving inside us, drawing us into the sacred work of saving this world from its narrowed view of life.”*

Now we can say to St. Paul, *“Now that we are with Christ, time is not running out, the world is not passing a way. Those having wives may act as having them, those weeping may weep, those rejoicing may rejoice, those buying may own, those using the world may use it fully. For the world in its present form is the temple of Christ’s Holy Spirit.”*

Lord, we know that you are here to save us

We know that you share with us our sorrows and our joys

*We know that nothing can ever separate us from you - neither death nor life,
neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow.
We know that not even the powers of hell can ever separate you from us - ever”*