

March 4, 2018

Third Sunday of Lent

Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up

Tragedy transforms us when we let the pain from it fall away

During these past two weeks, we have spent time reflecting on, and praying for all those who were impacted by the recent tragedy in Florida. We have also spent time reflecting on, and praying for the disruption and chaos it is causing around the country. I'd like to offer a meditation on this now. This time, it's about us:

Spiritual Transformation

Tragedy transforms us when we let the pain from it fall apart. Spiritual Transformation is *not so much when something new begins, as when something old falls apart*. It is a process of letting go, of letting things fall apart, of living in the confusing dark space for a while, allowing ourselves to be spit up on a new and unexpected shore, like Jonah. In these moments, hanging on to old "shoulds" and "oughts" doesn't help anymore, it just increases the shame, guilt and likelihood of backsliding.

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In a culture of progress and impatience with gradual growth, it can be difficult to accept God's way of restoring things in a much more patient and effective manner. Perhaps this is what Jesus is describing when he says, "*It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it*" (Mt. 7:14).

Suffering is the falling apart of old ways within us, along with the opening up to the experience of God as a mother who will not forget us, or be without tenderness for us who are from her womb. A time-honored way that helps open us to being "spit up" on a new shore we least expect or want is the way of Jesus, of Buddha, of various sages of Hinduism and of other ancient traditions. It is the focus on being Aware, on being Alive, Attentive, and Awake – all designed to keep us from being blown off balance by the challenges that face us.

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Being alive, awake, attentive, aware connects ourselves with all of life. "Being Awake" drops us down into the inner part of ourselves that is more real than what is passing before us; "Being Aware" means becoming a calm observer of the drama happening before us; "Being Attentive" keeps the emotional noise around us at a distance from ourselves; "Being Alive" reminds us that we are more than just what we feel. And where all these find their roots is in "Inner Silence." "Be still and know that I am God" says Ps. 46, and we will find ourselves in a larger presence that is stronger than anything that can upset us.

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Fr. Timothy Radcliffe says, "If we are to be transformed into people of tranquility, of quiet, of calm, an oasis of peace, we need to stop being people who fret over the lack of peace and the divisions and disturbances in our heart. Becoming people of tranquility, of quiet and calm keeps us from being people of fear and having to have things our way. Becoming people of quiet helps us face much more easily the differences we have within ourselves and with others. Being people of calm fills us with the peace of the risen Christ that can never be taken away, not even by tragedy."

Those pictures you see around the walls are the stand-ins for all of us - what is going on inside of you and me. I propose this questions for you/me to consider at this time. Is there a pain in you that is preventing your pain from being moved into spiritual transformation?

"Is there something that needs be being broken down in you for God to transform it into grace?"

"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone." Thomas Merton

Tragedy is transformed into grace when we let the pain from it fall apart