

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Aug 8th 2013

About fifteen years ago I was a member of a small group who worked to form a non-profit agency devoted to conflict resolution. We saw so many needs in our community and were eager to help people through difficult conflicts using mediation or group facilitation. Our group decided that I would be the Executive Director and we would initially set up shop in a corner of my kids' playroom.

The first several months were exciting times as we named the organization, developed mission and vision statements, filed required documents and began to offer services to clients in our community by using borrowed meeting rooms throughout the city. Countless hours were devoted to the dream of creating a vibrant conflict resolution center.

Yet, the organizational development work was much more difficult than I ever anticipated. Everything took longer than I thought it should. One lonely afternoon in the playroom when my children were still at school I collapsed into a chair sobbing about how I was sure I could not continue. The work was too challenging, the community too resistant, the operating funds too sparse.

But then something changed. I vividly remember a sense of calm come over me. I realized that this new conflict resolution center was not about me and how hard I was working. Suddenly I felt surrounded by God's love and by the love of those committed to helping others address their conflict. Being driven to the place of desperation helped me be open to feeling God's love.

This image came flooding back to me as I was reading today's readings. The Psalm reminds us "If today you hear his voice, harden not your heart." I always love praying and singing this wise statement. Of course I can hear God's voice through the laughter of family and friends. I feel so aware of God's voice when I am vacationing at the lake I visited as a child or when I am on retreat. And the earnest presence of my daughters, my students and my clients help me hear God's voice. Praying about my desolation as I was forming the conflict resolution center helped me realize all of the times I harden my heart to God's voice at the very time I need to trust in the sanctity of the Lord.

The trying times of our life, while extremely painful to endure, are wonderful opportunities to open ourselves to God's love. As I contemplated the first reading, I could feel the sense of confusion and exhaustion in Moses and Aaron. We have all been driven to our knees in one sense or another. How can I remember in times of despair to give it all over to God trusting in his love and sanctity? I will be listening more carefully in the times when I feel overwhelmed and hopeless. When I hear God's voice, I will not harden my heart.

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