

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 22nd 2013

The Power of the Particular

“Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.” (Psalm 40: 8-9)

Big changes can begin with an encounter. The newcomer at the A.A. meeting realizes: if this speaker quit drinking, so could I. Listening to the poet, a young person feels how writing is her deepest joy. On a service trip, students learn solidarity from the empowered residents of a poor community. Shadowing the emergency room doctor, a medical student decides that this work is right for him. One person’s spirit ripples through those at hand who are ready. An encounter at the right moment never leaves us.

In the film *American History X*, Derek extricates himself from the snares of white supremacy by working alongside a black man in the prison laundry. He was open to the news that his life was based on lies. Many see the light concerning a tough issue once someone we know makes it real for us. A stubborn mind can give way to embodied truth. And nothing embodies truth like its presence in another person.

We are made to learn from each other. That innate capacity can be our downfall. Paul writes about the one who brings salvation and the one who brings sin. Sin has an allure that takes hold when my desires become obsessive. We are lost and we are found in personal ways. At the Vietnam War Memorial, the enormous sadness of war rises up in the viewer who sees his face reflected in the names and dates on the dark, glossy stone.

God works through the particular. We have heard the stories all our lives. At some point, the words break through to my wandering mind. I listen in a new way. This man Jesus shows me who I am. This is what we have been waiting for. This story is real.

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