

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Jun 12th 2014

While going over the first two readings, I was struck by how large water looms in scripture--for better or worse. I thought about Noah and the flood that brought destruction and then a fresh start for mankind; or the Red Sea that parted for the Jews fleeing Egypt and engulfed their pursuers; and, of course, the water of baptism, from Jesus being baptized in the Jordan River to directing his disciples to baptize all nations. In the First Kings reading, Elijah prays for rain and ends a drought, establishing the Lord's supremacy over pagan gods. In the responsorial psalm, water is celebrated as a source of life, enabling fields to grow and "overflow with a rich harvest."

Here on the Great Plains, we certainly realize the power and importance of water. This is the time of year when we welcome rains to replenish water supplies and reinvigorate lawns, but we also experience wet, gloomy days as well as dangerous storms that bring lightning, hail, and even tornadoes. During the spring I am especially reminded of how changeable the weather is, how this is something that humans, in our vast wisdom and abilities, can't control. We are subject to the natural world that God created. Having said this, I also believe that we do have some choice in dealing with climate and the environment. Whether one acknowledges global warming or not, all people can and should respect the earth and its natural resources. We need to be good stewards of our waters, lands, and living things, to strive for sustainability rather than abuse and waste God's gifts.

The third reading, from Matthew, is about anger. It seems like we live in an age of anger. We hear the phrase and maybe even feel "road rage" as well as read about celebrities and other offenders who need "anger management." So many situations today are causes or effects of anger: partisan politics, computer crashes, Boko Haram, airport security, inequality, umpires, Vladimir Putin, school shootings. Wouldn't it be great if all of us could, as the gospel recommends, let go of our anger and be reconciled with each other? We need to be peacemakers—on the personal and global level. We must release our rage or our need to win and embrace compromise, forgiveness, mercy. We must think of others with love and not think of them as Raqa, which in Aramaic means "imbecile." (The wordsmith in me had to look this up!)

As always, the way to God—the way to follow the supreme commandment of loving God—is through one another and the second greatest commandment. In some respects, it is easier to love God, who isn't trampling our petunias or invading our nation, than it is to love our neighbor. It seems simpler and less messy to approach His altar than it is to have a meal or negotiate a peace treaty with those who have offended us or whom we've offended. But Jesus is adamant. We must settle with our opponents before going to God. His allusions to the scribes and Pharisees, who were very big on the letter of the law and correct behavior, remind us that the spirit of the law is even more important. Our actions should be infused with a sense of love; our hearts should not be hardened. We must always aim for reconciliation because love of God and love of neighbor are inextricable.

The etymology of the word reconcile is from the Latin and means “to bring together again.” As we consider this day, let us look for opportunities to forgo anger, mend wounds, and get back together with those at odds with us.

Mary Longo