

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Oct 7th 2014

A few years ago, I rediscovered the Rosary. This occurred while I was running. I was struggling--maybe while doing one of the many hills surrounding my neighborhood or perhaps during the last few miles of a race--and turned to prayer. The Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glory Bes became my mantra, a source of strength so familiar and rote that it made no demands on my anguished brain and body. Since then, whenever I run or even walk my dogs, I recite the Rosary, counting off the various mysteries with my fingers and committing the newest ones, the Luminous Mysteries, to memory. In my hectic and demanding life, this has become my best time for prayer and meditation. Sometimes I just say the words, trusting in their power; at other times I reflect on the life of Jesus, who was so extraordinary but also so human and in whose experiences I see parallels to mine or loved ones'. For instance, when I arrive at the Agony in the Garden, I think of my own dark nights of the soul or of others afflicted with fear, grief, and depression. The Carrying of the Cross makes me recall not only Jesus' suffering and bearing the burdens of all mankind but also the crosses of family and friends--cancer, Alzheimer's, loss of a child, disabilities, unemployment. One of my favorite Joyful Mysteries is the Visitation, when Mary journeyed to her cousin Elizabeth, who was with child in her old age. I connect with this in remembering my never-been-married, 40-year-old sister (also named Elizabeth) confiding in me her decision to adopt a child and how I eventually traveled to Vietnam with her to bring my new niece home. I often dedicate my rosaries to those who need prayers or in thanksgiving for the many gifts I have been given. On this day, the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary, consider rediscovering and celebrating this powerful way to pray.

I admit that I'm not that familiar with St. Paul's life and teachings. It is on my to-do list. As I read today's passage, however, I am struck by Paul's passion and zeal. He poured his heart and soul into everything he did; this was true both before and after his conversion. I love thinking about the dramatic change he experienced and his frank admission of mistakes, his acknowledgment that he "is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." He is a reminder of the power of God's grace as well as the possibilities of transformation.

Finally, whenever I encounter today's passage from the Gospel of Luke, I'm a little uneasy. I find myself sympathizing and even identifying with the hardworking, dutiful Martha, who is resentful of her carefree sister. (I also feel the same about the brother of the prodigal son.). I'm sure Martha was, like me, an oldest child and that she felt responsible for getting the meal on and serving her guests; she wanted to make sure everything was right. Shouldn't she get some credit for this? And, by the way, those dishes will not wash themselves. As I thought about this scene, I decided that Jesus is not repudiating who Martha is, nor is he declaring that Mary is the better person. He is merely saying that on this occasion Mary "chose the better part." She recognized the gift of Jesus' presence and his words. She was at the feet of the Word who became flesh; she had seized the moment. During one of my classes, as I was teaching my students about *carpe diem*, they were teaching me about YOLO, You Only Live Once. Both phrases remind us to live in the present, to take joy in the good things in life. Sometimes this may mean loosening up a bit, departing from the routine and letting go. Poor Martha had gotten bogged down, "anxious and worried about many things." (Sound familiar?) Mary, on the

other hand, kept her eye on the prize, the most important thing, the one true thing. Having said this, I don't believe that Jesus was giving Mary or any of us permission to sit around all day and abandon our chores and obligations. He was telling us, however, that sometimes the dishes can wait.

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