

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Feb 15th 2016

When I first read today's readings, I thought: Well, everyone knows these passages and what they mean. What will I add to it? But . . . as I read them over a few times and reflected upon this preparation season of Lent in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, I realized I had a lot to learn from truly pondering them and their deeper meanings.

Our first reading from the Old Testament lays down some very specific rules for us. The ones in this reading focus on our relationships with others – how we treat them, how we “judge” them, how we interact with them. The final statement says it all, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I always thought that was more of a New Testament concept but it stems from Leviticus. It would appear that if, indeed, you loved your neighbor you would never consider harming him or her in any way or having ill thoughts about them. It is so basic that we lose in the busyness of our lives. Our climb in the social ladder, the workplace hierarchy, the general competitiveness of this world – all influence us to forget this foundational rule. Instead, we place ourselves at the top and many times take actions to keep ourselves there. As we begin this Jubilee Year of Mercy, it would appear critical to remember this simple statement – even if one forgets all that came before that outlines how to treat others. How can I ever ask for or expect mercy if I am unwilling to give it myself? I do not have the opportunity to seat in judgment as in a court of law, yet nearly every day I do sit in judgment – I make snap decisions about others behaviors and motivations as I drive along in my auto. I draw conclusions about the behaviors I see in my fellow workers or students. In reality, I have many options throughout the day to judge others. Am I merciful in those times? Opportunities arise regularly for me to exercise mercy . . .

The responsorial psalm tells us in many ways that the words of God are a guiding light for us pointing us in the right direction. The phrases come at it from every angle: the law is perfect, the decree is trustworthy, the precepts are right, the command is clear. We are challenged, then, that our words also ring true and pure. What a challenge!

Let the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart

find favor before you,

O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Your words, Lord, are Spirit and life.

It is not easy to have those words and to keep our hearts focused on what is right. It is necessary for us to seek those around us whose hearts model that focus. It is essential to surround ourselves with such people and circumstances that nurture us and lead us in this path. While that may not be possible 24-7, we can find those oases throughout the day, the week, and be renewed and strengthened. I had the privilege to be a faculty/staff leader on a recent retreat with some of our students. My heart was filled with joy and contentment as I heard their stories and watched their paths. The presence of Jesus was palpable – it glowed from so many of these students and others were open to finding it for themselves. It is this type of renewal that fortifies us much like the supplements we take to be physically healthy, this fortifies our spiritual health and well-being.

This gospel is one of my favorites and a reality for most of us. As I noted at the beginning, this is something we have all read and heard many times. But while it is a challenge at times for me to live it, I see it in so many ways. I chuckled when driving with my daughter this fall and she excitedly did a U-turn to be sure to give one of her “homeless” bags to someone standing on the corner. She makes my heart smile when she prepares these and has them in her car to distribute. I see the kindnesses my husband is always willing to provide to those in recovery. I marvel as my son and daughter-in-law encourage their children to prepare boxes for Operation Christmas Child.

I am so blessed to have so many ways to reach out. As a community health/public health nurse I am privileged to practice my beloved nursing with many vulnerable and underserved populations. One of my favorite aspects is providing diabetic foot checks and care. I love sitting at their feet and providing this assessment in the most loving way possible. It is humbling and rewarding. My trips to the Dominican Republic for mission with ILAC (Institute for Latin American Concern) are priceless as we interact with the most humble and loving families and serve them while they teach us so much. I enjoy and am so enriched during our retreats with homeless women in recovery through ISP (Ignatian Spirituality Project). Being with these women for a weekend and watching them “fill-up” with the Holy Spirit is a blessing, indeed! However, what rises to the top for me is doing most of this with students. Seeing the love and soul that my students bring to these experiences be it ILAC or Project Homeless Connect is beyond words. I see them do for one of these least brothers of mine and I am filled with gratitude and hope for the future. During the Encounter Retreat this past weekend, I witnessed student leaders who live this gospel reach out to other students. The students were open and loving with old souls wise beyond their years. We all encountered Jesus in a very real way. My heart was so full so much of the time that it kept leaking out of my eyes! I am blessed . . .

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