

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Apr 7th 2017**

Years ago I had the pleasure of listening to one of my favorite authors, Kathleen Norris, read from her book, *Dakota*. Her words resonated with me in on many levels, particularly as she had moved to South Dakota from New York as my mother had done. Kathleen framed gossip in ways I had never considered. In her chapter "The Holy Use of Gossip," she names gossip as theology translated into experience. Gossip is how we face matters of life and death, how we transmit meaning. The word gossip is derived from the words God and sibling and means akin to God. Kathleen shares that small town gossip can be a safety valve and that gossip done well can be a holy thing.

This perspective on gossip came to mind as pray with today's readings which show us an extreme and dark side of gossip. The first reading from Jeremiah begins: Yes, I hear the whisperings of many: "Terror on every side! Denounce! Let us denounce him!" All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. "Perhaps he can be tricked; then we will prevail, and take our revenge on him." Although feeling despair, Jeremiah expresses his great faith in the Lord who will rescue the life of the poor from the power of the wicked.

There have been times when I have been driven to despair by the whisperings of many. Perhaps I was standing up for something that was going against popular culture. Or trying to bring creativity and innovation to the workplace which can threaten the status quo and empower those who are watching for my misstep. And I painfully recall times when I have behaved in a less than kind way and used my gift of storytelling to portray someone in a negative frame. During all of these times I need to put my faith in the Lord to keep me strong as I strive to live as Jesus has taught us to live. And when I am the vengeful one I pray for forgiveness.

Today's responsorial psalm reminds me to enter into that prayer: In my distress I called upon the Lord, and he heard my voice. We each share a fundamental desire to be heard. That is why we interrupt, repeat ourselves, say sharp comments, beg for attention. How lovely to know that we simply need to call up on the Lord who is always there to hear us.

In the gospel from John, the Jews are about to stone Jesus not for his actions but for his words. Jesus bravely speaks with his attackers to try understand their fear and anger. Fear drives so much conflict as we can see across our country and across the globe. Jesus provides an inspiring example to try to understand the other's perspective and to speak your own truth.

In my Lenten journey I pray for the grace to use gossip as a holy way to lift people up, to give voice to those who need that support and to define how we can work together to build the kingdom of God.

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