

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 28th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

I went shopping today at a tea store. There were hundreds of options and the teas were in large containers and the nice person weighed each of my selections. There was nothing prepackaged and I had a sense of being in touch with authenticity. The experience was contrasted by my next visit to a plastic-wrapped, cellophane-secured-from-germ store. There was no person waiting and weighing, except the checkout somebody wishing me a “great day” which also seemed cellophaned

As we prepare to celebrate our next Eucharist we might pray with the temptations to be plastic. For me, this means being predictable, standard, distant, germless, indirect, formally-gracious, but not necessarily a grace. I was surprised by the personal attention and interaction of the tea-lady today. While waiting for my purchases, I was singing softly to myself and she said I had a good voice and would I sing a song for her. I did! Right out loud! She did not reduce the price for all that.

Jesus was wrapped in authenticity as human as well as divine. Our reception of his Body is the authentic Life and Love of God waiting to be wrapped in all that is graciously graceful of our humanity. We can pray with the chances given to us to let him out and making him real.

REFLECTION

In our First Reading for this liturgy, we hear the conclusion of a great experience of being on mission. Paul and Barnabas did some wonderful things, so wonderful that the people shouted that Zeus and Hermes, Greek gods were visiting them. The two preachers shouted the louder that they were only humans doing the work of bringing good news to them.

They had their hardships of course and grew through them in their trust of God’s love and God’s use of them. We hear of their returning to the place where they had been given the mission of proclaiming the Word and initiating communities of faith. They were grace-charged humans, instruments in the hands of God. Those through the centuries who have entered into this instrumentality have known also their being in those same Hands.

This past Holy Thursday we heard in the Gospel the verses leading up to those we hear today. Jesus has washed the feet of his followers; Judas has dirtied his hands by his betrayal. Jesus is back at the table and John pictures Jesus as beginning the Good-News, Bad-News of his last hours with his friends, whom he regards as “My Children”. The bad news is that he is going to be with them for only a little while longer. The good news is that he will be revealed in all his glory, upon the Cross. Jesus, according to John, will spend the next four chapters making sure his message is stated as clearly as possible.

What is most clear and which will be repeated exactly in chapter fifteen, is that he wishes them to love one another and by this love stay together as well as increase in fruitfulness. By this mutual reverence the love that is the “glory” of God will be experienced by others and so will be drawn into the company of believers.

John’s Gospel takes various elements from the book of Genesis. Here John has Jesus giving “a new commandment” which is to “love one another”. The first and newest commandment was creation, “Let there be.....” Light, order, life and fertility were results of a divine creative command. The Fall resulted in darkness, disorder, living outside the original context and fertility was to be experienced in pain.

Jesus commands a “new” kind of creational love which is meant to bring back light, reverence, respect for what is and a relational exchange of interiors. The disciples are commanded to love each other into more and more life as Jesus had done with them. Jesus had given them as much as they could handle. Now he was urging them to love outside the circle, beyond the eleven elect. They were to encourage others to reverence themselves as gifts prepared to be given in gratitude to others.

Not all of us enter the process of bringing new sacred life into this circle of love. We all are commanded to co-create, co-sculpture, and co-recover the lives within our life’s circle. When understood, this “new commandment” urges us beyond the emotional experience of love. We are missioned to continue God’s creational, resurrectional love. I am how God continues to say, “Let there be light” because of me. “Let there be order” because of how I live. Imagine all that! That is mighty “new” and yet a commandment which surpasses all others.

Obviously we have the opposite power as well. There is our ability to also de-create, it is the “old commandment” which the Devil gave to Adam and Eve. Jesus is inviting his disciples and us to accept our being loved by the Creating God and having accepted that, we are urged gracefully to be instruments of attracting others into the circle of life. If I love you, I will want you to be, not more than

you can be, but more of the God-loved person you are. The more my love for you helps you to love yourself, the more the circle will be created larger, deeper. The more you have of your true self, the more you will want to share and give others their life.

Jesus was handing his life over to us before he handed his life over to death. We are now commanded to be the instruments - sacraments - making his creative love a real presence in the circle of life.

“I am the true vine and you are the branches, says the Lord. Whoever remains in me, and I in him, bears fruit in plenty, Alleluia” Jn. 15, 5

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