



Come and See!

Week of September 13, 2020

The Word...

Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight.
The vengeful will suffer the LORD's vengeance... Forgive your neighbor's
injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.

Could anyone nourish anger against another
and expect healing from the LORD?

Could anyone refuse mercy to another like himself?

Can he seek pardon for his own sins?

If one who is but flesh cherishes wrath, who will forgive his sins?

Remember your last days, set enmity aside;
remember death and decay, and cease from sin!

(from Sir 27:30-28:7)

(The Book of Sirach is not part of the Hebrew Bible,
and is found in the Apocrypha of most Protestant Bibles.)

Pondering the Word...

"Nourishing anger?" "Cherishing wrath?" "The vengeful will suffer." Another week and yet another Old Testament reading that hits uncomfortably close to home. These are powerful, vivid, all-too-real words for us. There is a lot of nourishing anger and cherishing wrath going on. Vengeance seems to be the name of the game, at least if you pay attention to the news feed. My guess is that, just like today, the good news, the loving acts of neighbor to neighbor, didn't make it into the reporting of the writers and prophets of old!

But just like in the days of old, there is an antidote, one that Jesus refers to in today's gospel: Forgiveness. Modeling the mercy and compassion God has for each of us. And it is one of the hardest things for us to do. Some people nourish hurts and vengeful emotions like wounds of war. They hug them closely-- cherish them-- as a twisted security blanket on which they have come to rely. Others let these emotions take hold of them and try as they may to wrestle free, the negativity only winds itself tighter. And for others, forgiveness is not even an option. Their only solace comes in seeing the other suffer punishment. All this causes is more pain.

Forgiveness is a gift we give: to another, to ourselves, and to God. And like the father in the story of the prodigal son who forgives his son even before he repents and returns, we can begin to forgive today.

Living the Word...

"At the end of life, the wish to be forgiven is ultimately the chief desire of almost every human being. In refusing to wait; in extending forgiveness to others now, we begin the long journey of becoming the person who will be large enough, able enough, and generous enough to receive, at the very end, that absolution for ourselves."

(David Whyte, from *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*)

Look at your own heart. Our deepest hurts are the most personal, and many times, the person we need to forgive is ourselves. Or perhaps we've been hurt by the leadership of our country or our church. Forgiveness does not preclude justice, but we begin to break the cycle of revenge and violence and hatred when we extend a hand in reconciliation. Seek help from a spiritual guide or minister if the ability for forgive eludes you. Pray God will guide you on the road to forgiveness.

Personal Reflections and Ideas...

Mon, Sep 14: *In punishment the LORD sent among the people saraph serpents, which bit the people so that many of them died. Then the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned in complaining against the LORD and you."* (Nm 21:4-9) I don't believe God sends punishment for our sins. We bring it upon ourselves. As Moses tells the people in Dt 10:13, the commandments are "for your own good!" When we abuse God's earth, ravage her resources, kill her creatures—including human beings—by poaching, starvation, and the like, all in the name of greed; when we covet, steal, and hoard the fruits of the earth, we reap the consequences. When we ignore lying and rampant abuse of power just to achieve a few specific ends, we suffer. Natural disasters and pandemics will occur whether we are saints or sinners, but the intensity with which they occur, the lessons we learn, and the way we work together as part of the kingdom of God -- not the kingdom of Israel or the US or Brazil, etc., --can either ease or worsen the damage they do. The Israelites took responsibility for their suffering. When will we?

Tue, Sep 15: *"Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts."* (1 Cor 12:12-14, 27-31)

Paul enumerates several spiritual gifts: prophecy, doing "mighty deeds," healing, fluency in languages, and... administration? Where did that come from? But it's true. All of us know gifted leaders and ones who are not. In the book, *A Failure of Nerve*, the late Dr. Edwin Friedman, defines the well-differentiated leader: "... someone who has clarity about his or her own life goals...someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about...who can be separate while still remaining connected, and therefore can maintain a modifying, non-anxious, and sometimes challenging presence...who can manage his or her own reactivity to the automatic reactivity of others, and therefore be able to take stands at the risk of displeasing." (1999, p. 13). Sounds like Jesus, doesn't it? And how does one strive for this or any spiritual gift? The answer, found in tomorrow's reading from First Corinthians, is love: Love of God, selfless love of self in God, and love of others. (Parents: look at Friedman's words as a great guide for raising kids as well.)

Wed, Sep 16: *"When I was a child, I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things."* (1 Cor 12:31-13-13)

"But Paul, what about Jesus' words: 'Unless you become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven?'" Scholars say Jesus is referring to a child's dependence -- and likening it to our need to depend on God -- rather than to a child's innocence or sense of wonder, but let's think about this: What do we lose when we begin thinking like an adult? We tend to become more self-reliant, yes, but we also may become jaded, overly busy, thinking, *"There is nothing new under the sun."* I'm glad my faith has matured from the faith I had as a child, but there are things I have to fight to hold onto: my belief in the inherent goodness of human beings, my sense of awe at God's creation. Reflect today on aspects of your faith that could benefit from some childlike innocence. *"In soft whisperings from the heart, the child within offers you always the thread of your truth. May you cherish that child, trust that voice, and weave that thread richly into the fabric of your days."* (Anonymous)

Thu, Sep 17: *"So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love."* (Lk 7:36-50)

If you follow Jesus' logic in the story he tells the Pharisee in today's gospel, the word "hence" in this verse (which is not in all translations) becomes even more important. The woman shows great love *because* her sins have been forgiven. It is not she who first shows great love. It is the one who forgives.

Fri, Sep 18: *"Jesus journeyed... Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women..."* (Lk 8:1-3)

'Such scandal this Jesus causes wherever he goes! Eating and drinking with sinners, followed by a ragtag team of ignorant fisherman, tax collectors, and radicals. Oh, and the women! Don't get me started! What are they doing out of their homes, following him around? They should be keeping silent, staying in their place. Just you watch. Pretty soon, they'll think *they* can preach and prophesy in God's name!'

Sat, Sep 19: *"Someone may say, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come back?' What you sow is not brought to life unless it dies....It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."* (1 Cor 15: 35-37, 42-49)

I'm not going to touch the subject of the resurrection of the body—it is far beyond my knowledge and understanding. But our friend, Paul, has some thought-provoking words here for our consideration and prayer. I am reminded of de Chardin's quote: *"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."* In what shape is your spiritual body these days?