



September 23, 2018

Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

...*"If anyone wishes to rank first he shall remain last of all and servant of all."* Mark 9:35

Dear Friends;

Reading our Gospel passage from Mark it is impossible not to think of the current crisis in the Church. There is a struggle in the Church for a direction. One direction is to return to a mythologized and idealized past. This is a Church of empire with a powerful princely hierarchy who exercise total control. And the other direction is an incarnational Church focused on embodying the living Jesus. This Church is attentive to the cries of the poor and our mother earth. And welling up between them is the sexual abuse crisis.

We may be tempted to smooth the crisis over by acknowledging "a few bad apples" who managed to manipulate the patriarchal power system. However, the sexual abuse crisis is symptomatic of deep structural dysfunction that left unattended will tear the church apart. Franciscan, Sr. Ilia Delio writes:

We are at a crossroads in the Church, a decisive moment for the future of an institution that is sinking in corruption. "Trust in God and trust in me" Jesus said (John 14:1). The time is coming when every person who loves the Church will have to face death in many forms, in what we have known, in what we have loved and in what we have cherished. The dawning of a new Church is upon us and what form this Church will take in the future depends on the depth of our inner freedom to act in new ways.

In the Gospel today, Jesus is inviting us to deconstruct the imperial system of power and authority. This system relies on coercion and an all-powerful hierarchy to impose its will. Jesus is subverting the order of this world. In its place he invites us to the vision of the coming reign of God.

What Jesus reveals is a self-emptying God. God pours Godself out unto death for the sake of new life. Rather than live out of this core belief we have spiritualized it into personal piety. But in these times of crisis we, the Church, are challenged to act on this belief. The God of Jesus Christ is a God of absolute love and radical freedom. This God is not revealed in the power of coercion or dominating hierarchies or exclusionary behavior.

The God of Jesus is revealed in the power of darkness, emptiness, and death. It is the powerlessness of the cross. This is the power of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Letting go and dying is integral to life. In the Gospel of Matthew (10:39) Jesus tells us "if you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it."

Jesus places the child in the midst of the disciples and invites them to receive the child. What he is doing is grounding us, his Church, in this self-emptying God. Children in the culture of Jesus represent the least and lowest. They had no status. 30 percent of live births died. 60 percent of children were dead by the age of sixteen. In a famine children were fed last. In the family hierarchy children ranked just one level above the slaves. This is different from our culture (which under the influence of Christianity) has changed attitudes about children. Nevertheless, the invitation of Jesus is to a self-emptying love which brings about life. So that our children may thrive and live in safety there may be many things in the Church that must die. May that death lead to a Church raised up to more closely resemble Jesus, the prophet of the radical love of God!

Peace,

Fr. Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.stannechurchbyron.com