

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
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### ZEAL OF EXILES

I draw my reflection today from Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 describing the faith of Abraham and Sarah. The faith of Abraham and Sarah is where the stream of Biblical faith begins. And in this stream, of faith-filled characters, a notable feature is that most were exiles or refugees. So, today I want to talk about this overlooked feature of Biblical Faith, which I call Zeal of the Exiles.

Exilic Zeal appears, I think, in two areas of the body: Mind and Gut. Zeal in the mind results in Vision. Zeal in the gut or heart results in Courage. Let me begin with Vision. In the Man of La Mancha, Don Quixote sings:

To dream the impossible dream

To fight the unbeatable foe

To bear with unbearable sorrow

To run where the brave dare not go....

To right the unrightable wrong

To love pure and chaste from afar

To try when your arms are too weary

To reach the unreachable star.

The Impossible Dream was first sung on stage on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1965, exactly two years after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, chosen by the producers of Man of La Mancha, to proclaim that Camelot was still alive.

The quest of Don Quixote, "To Right the Unrightable wrong," could be seen as Madness. And "To Fight the Unbeatable Foe" might seem an unhealthy crazy goal.

Or, maybe it is a kind of higher sanity. Ernest Becker, who wrote *Denial of Death*, relates how the *Salpetriere*, a French mental hospital, was vacated at the time of the French Revolution. The mentally ill discovered in the Revolution a self-transcendence and heroic identity, the denial of which was part of their sickness.

In *Man of La Mancha* Don Quixote says, “You think my quest is madness, but the Greatest Madness of all is to see the world as it is, and not as it should be.”

What made Abraham and Sara leave their settled life and begin their quest? Neighbors and family probably thought they were Mad. The Letter to the Hebrews however tells us: “By Faith Abraham and Sarah obeyed when they were called to go out, to a place that they were to receive, as an inheritance; they went out, not knowing where they were going. By faith they sojourned the Promise Land as in a foreign country, for they were looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God.”

Faith then is a kind of Higher Sanity which overwhelms the minds and hearts of Exiles and Refugees. Most of our Bible was written down during the Babylonian Exile, when the Promised Land had indeed become an unreachable star.

Galut is the Hebrew word for Exilic Zeal. And it was Galut which energized the mind and guts of the folks who gave us our Bible. They were people longing to reach the Promised Land or Return to it from Exile.

Let’s take a closer look at Galut as it exists today. Specifically try to picture the lives of refugees in a typical camp in Uganda where tens of thousands live on a few acres of barren land; in fact, that land was probably designated a camp because it was worthless for farming. The refrain you’d hear on the lips of refugees is: “I do not want to die in this camp. I will not die in this camp.” Yet, 90% will live and die in the camp.

And that is a predicament. Refugees in the camp are neither at home, or are they settled in a promised land. They are in an in-between place both physically and psychologically. This displacement, halfway from an old reality and halfway to a new one, can create the Zeal, the kind of Vision I'm talking about. But displacement can also create despair.

Exiles, especially the 90% of camp refugees whose exile will be permanent, are faced then with two fundamental choices: remain homeless or make a home in the "NOT YET." Those who choose the first option might find it easier to live in the halfway place, though they may feel only half alive. Those who choose the second option are not satisfied with the halfway place, and so by faith they dare to live as if they had already arrived in the Promised Land. They make a home in the future. Yes, they're still in the camp but as Visionaries and Prophets. Maybe they'd even describe why they are in the camp with words similar to those of Don Quixote –

"This is my quest, to fight for the right,

Without question or pause .... Choosing to march into hell, for a heavenly cause."

The Camp Visionaries are small in number but rally other Camp-Lifers. The Camp Visionaries have eyes trained in the practice of hope. They strain harder to hear the whisper of angels. They lean a bit more over the rail which separates this world from the Kingdom of Heaven. Some lean so far over the rail that they slip and plunge headlong into holy madness, the madness of a Don Quixote.

My reflection today is about Faith, or that Exilic Zeal found in two areas of the body – the mind and the gut. Zeal in the mind fuels Vision. Zeal in the gut fuels Courage. Let me say something now about Faith which is Zeal in the gut.

Albert Camus, French novelist and socialist, born in Algeria, defined Faith as "That infinite loathing for what makes children suffer."

On August 15<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate the Assumption or Ascension of Mary. In fact, for me Mary is the exemplar of Zeal in the Gut. In my mind the book-end images of Mary's Refugee story are Mary in the Sinai teaching her Magnificat song to the boy Jesus; and Mary in the Book of Apocalypse, giving birth to the New Jerusalem.

Imagine Mary and Jesus in Exile. As the lone survivor of the Massacre of the Innocents, the boy Jesus is being prepared, to return, and face those Herods who make children suffer. There in the refugee camp in Sinai, Mary's Child speaks these words to She who saved him:

You have shown the strength of your arm,

You have scattered the proud-hearted,

You have brought down the mighty from their thrones,

You have lifted up the lowly;

You have filled the hungry with good things,

According to the promise made to Abraham.

Now imagine the final part of Mary's Refugee Story.... In Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible, there are many scary end-time scenes but the early Christians saw the end of this world and the beginning of a better one, as something to be hoped for. Zeal in the Gut, radical hope, is graphically depicted in the image of Mary. "A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and in the process of giving birth."

Certainly that is Zeal in the Gut! And that is courage, because standing by her as she gives birth, is a terrible dragon who would destroy her and what she is birthing. But Mary's courage is rewarded; see what her maternal zeal has brought to birth:

As recorded in Apocalypse chapter 21...

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, dropping down.”

So friends, to end this reflection on the Zeal of Exiles, let's pray this refugee version of the Hail Mary:

Oh Holy Mary, Queen of the Future,

Mother of the New Jerusalem,

Oh Gentle Woman,

Pray for us exiles,

(That means all people on earth)

Pray for us exiles,

To conceive this Radical Hope,

Not an Impossible Dream,

And give it Birth,

Now, Here, on Earth.

Amen

Peter Daino given at All Saints on August 10/11 in the year 2019