

Holy Thursday – 2015

Father John Dear, author and prophet of peace, tells a great story about an experience his mother had as a nurse at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City in the 1950s:

One day a homeless, destitute man was brought to St. Vincent's after being found unconscious, in an alley in the Bowery, and very ill... no friends; no relatives.

A few days later at the hospital, the man received a letter from the late Dorothy Day founder of the Catholic Worker Movement – the same movement that our Friends Dorothy House is connected with today.

The man was so happy that he got a letter in the mail! He shared it with the doctors and nurses and staff. Each person who read the letter was astonished at the beauty and love and concern of the letter. Dorothy Day wrote to the homeless man as if he were the Pope or the President; for Dorothy Day this dying, homeless man was Christ himself and he deserved the best care and greatest love the world could offer.

In the letter, she invited him to come and live and die at the Catholic Worker Farm in Easton, New Jersey. In the letter she wrote:

"We would be honored to have you with us. Our farm is not an Institution. It is a home and we want to welcome you to our home with us, to be a member of our family; to rest and live and die in peace surrounded by those who love you."

Really, just like the Friends of Dorothy House!

+++++

Sisters and brothers, to me – this beautiful story is at the heart of what our Christian faith is all about, and parallels the final lesson that Jesus gave his disciples on that Holy Passover night just before he went up to the Garden of Olives to pray, while awaiting his passion and death.

We can just imagine the shock of that last Passover supper 2000 years ago: when Jesus...

Jesus – the teacher,

Jesus – the master... leaves the table,

takes off his cloak,

rolls up his sleeves,

ties a towel around his waist,

bends over... and washes the feet of the disciples!

+++++

The spiritual writer Henri Nouwen wrote:

“We have a bent-over God, who invites us to bend over and serve one another in love.”

Jesus said: “Do you realize what I have done for you? If I – your teacher – washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow; what I have done for you, you should also do!”

In this final lesson, final class before his passion, Jesus culminates all his teaching with the invitation – the command – to serve, one another – to serve one another in love. The phrase: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ is actualized in service to our neighbor, and, for Jesus ‘our neighbor’ is expanded to include

our relatives...,
our community and neighborhood...,
our nation...,
our enemies...,
all of humanity....

In our global village, we are all children of one God; we are sisters and brothers to one another....

In our 21st century – day-by-day – we are also realizing that if Mother Earth is to survive, our notion of ‘neighbor’ must extend, as Pope John Paul II stated, to the rest of Creation: “to all other creatures in the Community of Creation!

“Who is our neighbor? The Samaritan, the outcast, the enemy, yes, of course; but it is also the whale, the dolphin, the rain forest... Our ‘neighbor’ is the entire universe, and we must love and serve it as our self.”

Sisters and brothers, at this our evening Mass of the Last Supper, I would invite us to take a couple of moments in silent reflection on our call to service, as a member of our All Saints Parish, in our own particular life circumstances... ..

I now invite you to stand. This evening we have an opportunity to recommit ourselves to service in our Parish and beyond. Our response to this question – if we so choose – is “I do.”

“My sisters and brothers, on this Holy Thursday, as Disciples of Jesus, as members and friends of All Saints Parish do you re-commit yourselves to be of service to others in a Spirit of Gospel love?”

Assembly: I do!

[Jack Ziegler – Facilitator of the Pastoral Council – speaking on behalf of the All Saints Parish Community, thanks Fr. Fred for his servant-leadership to date and asks if he chooses to recommit himself to continue in service to the Parish. Fr. Fred responds: “With the help of God’s grace, I do!”]