

Dirty Hands

The other day I was reading an article that quoted the chorus of the song Hands Dirty – written by the folk-rock band, with southern roots, *Delta Rae*. In the midst of this Covid 19 pandemic, with a rare spotlight on the service industry, the words of this song really struck me.

The song gives voice to a woman who – like many in the service industry – works hard but doesn't catch a break:

“I get my hands dirty
I show up so early
They show me no mercy
So I just keep working
Maybe God can save me”

In this song, I heard the voices of all those service workers in our Nation who up to the time of this Pandemic, have most often hardly been recognized or appreciated or respected; their labor usually under-valued – especially women, and most especially, women of color – who are disproportionately marginalized in the workforce.

- we have parishioners who are cleaning hospital rooms of Covid 19 patients, at times without all the necessary protective gear, working at minimum-wage, scared to death that they might bring the virus home to their family;
- the trillion dollar CARE Acts passed by Congress, is a blessing, though more is critically needed... However, the only way the Bills got through and signed into law, was by agreeing to deny *any* assistance to the over 11 million undocumented workers in our Nation, many of whom have been here for 10, 20, 30 years or more – and have been paying federal and state taxes, but receiving nothing from the government.

Even though the woman in our song experienced the sharp-end of the Nation's economic/capitalistic stick, the song made it clear she wasn't giving up; she was going to keep working, ...imagining that the future could be different.

As I reflected on the song, I thought: isn't that our work right now – as disciples of Jesus – to get our hands dirty? To imagine a different way of being and – as a nation and a world – taking a leap of faith: digging deeper and rolling up our sleeves?

Our Gospel today can shed some light on these questions. Most often we interpret Thomas as the one who doubted, refused to accept what the others were telling him about Jesus. But another way of looking at Thomas is that he had the integrity, the courage to admit that he just couldn't fully believe *until he had a direct experience*. His direct experience involved getting his 'hands dirty' – when Thomas, touched with his fingers, the wounds of Christ, *the experience allowed him to believe!*

For all of us as disciples, experience is critical. Without knowing wounds and bleeding and injustice ourselves and experienced by others (as exemplified in our sisters and brothers in the service industries), we cannot imagine a different future or a different now. The story of Thomas reminds us that transformation can occur in the moments when experience and imagination come into contact with one another. The experience of some volunteers in a soup kitchen or food pantry might be an example: When they first begin to listen to the stories of those needing the services, they question how could this be? ... in the richest nation in the world? and then, they begin to discuss with others: how might things be different? And, joining with others, they begin to create the system anew; a transition effected by rolling-up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty.

Sisters and brothers, in the midst of turmoil and agony (as exemplified globally in the Covid 19 Pandemic) these moments could help us as a world and a Nation, forge a different way forward. As mentioned in last week's homily, business as usual is not working, but: *we can do together what we cannot do alone!* On many levels, the experience of the Pandemic is pushing us out of ourselves, to see the reality of systemic injustice firsthand, moving us beyond the temptation to think that if it doesn't happen to us directly – it's not real. While sheltering in place these days, it's not hard to identify with those disciples in our Gospel, in the upper room with the doors locked, filled with fear that what happened to Jesus might happen to them; but their experience of the risen Jesus *with them*, breathing the peace of the Spirit on them, gave them the courage to open the door, go down to the streets and bring the Good News to the world! And as we see in the Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, it wasn't long before those disciples imagined a different world where all are treated in sisters and brothers, children of the same God.

The description of that first Christian community always reminds me of an emerging parish community; listen to how that community is described:

“They devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles and the communal life, to the Breaking of the Bread, and to the prayers. They shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all – according to what each one needed; and every day the Lord added to their group.”

It's a microcosm of the world God intended!

Experience *plus* Imagination *equals* Transformation!

Thomas, getting his hands dirty, touched the wounds of the Risen Christ and was transformed and when we, as disciples, touch the wounds of the world – which in essence are the wounds of the Risen Christ – *we are transformed*.

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On Tuesday of this coming week, we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day and the 5th Anniversary of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The Pandemic could not be a more stark reminder of how all of Creation is connected. Mary Oliver captures this reality well in her poem "Upstream."

"I would say that there exist a thousand unbreakable links between each of us and everything else, and that our dignity and our chances are one. The farthest star and the mud on our feet, are a family; and there is no decency or sense of honoring one thing, or a few things, and then closing the list. The pine tree, the Platte River and ourselves we are at risk together or — we are on our way to a sustainable world together. We are each other's destiny!"

Amen!

Sister Terri was kind enough to locate a video of Delta Rae's "Hands Dirty," for our refectioin.