

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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Kathleen Owens
All Saints Parish, Syr. NY

The Christ Presence

Today we hear Paul telling us "*Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things of earth.*" Then he says: "*Put to death everything in you that belongs to your old nature*"

Well - I have some trouble with that for two reasons: I'm not criticizing Paul.. I haven't looked up the Greek words or the culture of that letter to grasp the meaning of those days, I am just saying this is how the words struck me this week.

1- His advice "put to death" what is within ourselves seems to put me in control of who I am and can become... My experience doesn't show I have that much control of myself... and 2 - I don't think splitting myself from myself and from the things of earth would really lead me deeper into God.

I guess an awful lot depends on what our image of God is and if it has changed at all over the years. Back in the years before Vatican II our image of God was of a Person in heaven - up above – who watched all we did and sort of tallied it up – like Santa making a list and checking it twice – only God's list went on until we died. I can remember Mom saying – "Remember even if no one sees you, God sees you." Well, that made me think twice about the cookie jar!

There is a cute story of that mentality of those days and I love to share it – but

for all the children – **this is not how** God is!!! Anyway there was this little boy who hated stewed prunes! One day he managed to eat most of them but then - had enough and left 2... he just stopped and refused to finish them. His Mom told him.... "Finish the prunes or go to bed!" He refused and on his way to his room, she added in exasperation – "God gets very angry over disobedient children." Later that night a terrible storm blew up with flashing lightning and thunder loud enough to scare the bravest person. The mother feared her son would be frightened and went to his room. As she opened the door, she saw him at the window, arms crossed, staring into the storm and muttering: "All that fuss over 2 prunes!"

So where is my focus going? I realize both our first reading and the words of Jesus are really talking about more than finding our joy in the accumulation or pride in what we accomplish or possess.

Let me go back to the two points I had at the beginning.... questioning our real control and our thoughts of earthly things. All that is human in us is gift - All our tendencies and emotions are given to us for our good. It can take us time and experience to realize that these very tendencies and emotions can prompt us to recognize our power and use it over others. Those are the painful times that Paul is describing as our "old nature". I don't believe we can or should just cut these tendencies out of ourselves or that hating them is the answer. These sinful times or actions can truly be the transforming moments when we become aware that we are being untrue to ourselves. It is this very time in our lives when in seeing our failures, we can also glimpse how we could be. In uniting our failures to our true call, we can find the strength to go beyond our goal of personal gain.

As for the things of our world,

If God is the Creator of all that is in our world, then our human world has become filled with Divine Presence. If our human life contains our parents' DNA - then all of creation contains the DNA or Real presence of our Creator! Every tree - every flower - every mountain and rock - every human is a beautiful place to experience the Divine Presence! The funny looking tulip bulb I plant in the fall holds the Creating Presence to grace my yard with the beautiful flower of spring. It is all contained within.... waiting for the right elements to grow. And so for us, it all depends on when and if we become mindful of those right elements that call us to growth.

In an English Assignment, Chris, a high school boy wrote : "I was skiing all alone down a slope. Suddenly I pulled up and stopped. I still don't know why; it was like someone said, 'Stop, Chris.' Everything was quiet and beautiful. The clear blue sky above me, the soft white snow below me and the green cedars on each side of me. As I stood there, a strange feeling came over me and a strange thought entered m mind: 'God is here with me!' It was a moment I'll never forget." That was a contemplative moment in Chris.... Everyday life is filled with divinity - we just have to recognize it.

A minister lost both legs as a result of war injuries and was feeling useless and discarded. Then doctors asked him to talk with patients facing similar operations. God's love became so alive to him in the form of encouraging others, that by using the worst thing in his life, found that a new life was born.

One night during wartime, a British surgeon told how he witnessed a soldier, who realized he was dying, took the only blanket covering him in his final hours and placed it over the shivering body of a pneumonia-stricken buddy in the next bunk. The surgeon wept over that selfless moment and knew God's Presence was there.

An elderly man stood alone weeping at the Vietnam memorial in Washington. Moved by this, a young man walked over and put his hand on the man's shoulder and said: "One of yours, sir?" The man turned and answered: "Not one of them, son – all of them." God's love for all of us can be understood in our human life.

We are really talking about awakening to a contemplative approach to life which we need to foster within our busy daily lives. That simply means cultivating an attitude of mindfulness for the task at hand. I know our lives are so busy and for many, so stressed. However, if we can find even 5 minutes to stop and be quiet.... look at nature - listen to the sounds around us and hear the silence between us and those sounds – just become aware of our breath – our heartbeat – whatever helps you – we will find our days taking on a new perspective.

First of all, we usually see time as horizontal and fleeting, but there is a depth to every moment. Have you ever stopped still to watch a rainbow? In the midst of a long winter and the cold of March, what goes through you when you hear and see the geese flying north? ...or you see your first robin?

Have you ever gone outside in the dark of night and almost lost your breath over the night sky filled with silent stars? Have you ever stood – watching a baby sleep? We *all* have had moments where – we've stopped and gone down into a moment and let ourselves just BE there.

All moments contain depths. Being mindful of what we are about helps us to enter those depths. When we take those 5 or whatever moments of silence in each day, we are actually moving into ourselves. In that aloneness within – we come to our origin...and that origin is the recognition of the Christ Presence within everything.

Within those moments looking up into the night skies, we are caught up in awe, within those moments of geese and robins, we feel the new hope of Spring revealed. Within those moments over a sleeping baby, we know within ~ our love and protection of a new life – in all his/her innocence and vulnerability.

Those are moments of self-transformation by the Christ Presence within us – connecting us to that Presence in all people and life in this world. That is why the man at the Viet Nam Wall wept for all his sons and daughters – for we are all united as one – created to be that way.

That union of Presence then awakens our desire to become our true self – and to manifest to our world a tangible way God is uniting all of us from within – to sustain each other in our struggles and to rejoice with each other in our joys – until as Paul says:

“There is only Christ – who is all and in all!”