

Sept. 8 & 9, 2018
Kathleen Owens

All Saints Parish
Syracuse, NY

23rd Sunday B Homily

"The moving finger of God in human history points ever in the same direction.
There must be Community. (Howard Thurman)

We have been a parish with goals of inclusivity, honesty and Welcoming. With the current investigations of the ever horrible sin of abuse in our Church, we have come together as a parish in a Listening Session to discuss, to vent, to offer suggestions for ways to regain the purpose Jesus gave us in the reality of His life.

We watched Spotlight and came together again last Thursday to further discuss the current ongoing investigations and some very concrete steps were offered to move forward. It was clear that we are about more than "punish and prevent" now.

Our present Metoo movement in our society also demonstrates that we are confronting a culture of abuse of power that has grown from the centuries of living in an institutions that presents a hierarchical structure. That wasn't what Jesus set out to create.

Yet, we still suffer and try to understand why this has existed in people we have trusted and where and how to go forward. The pain was evident in the comments Thursday evening.

In 2006 I was asked to join the Diocesan program led by Teresa Secreti in the beginning and Nuala Collins, 2 women who were leaders in the helping of those early victims who had come forward. These monthly meetings were meant to provide a presence for those to feel free to express their pain with one another / in the hope that time together in a safe situation would help to begin healing.

In the beginning I thought it was for me to provide a spiritual component that would help to create this safe environment for them to share with each other. Their years of feeling isolated had also been damaging and our hope was that within a community of understanding and sharing they could sense a new beginning of self-worth and healing. It didn't take more than one meeting for me to realize how little I understood and it opened me to the sense of the horrors they experienced as young people. Many still had intense flashbacks and for some,speaking of them helped but for others, it was too much and they dropped out. I can't begin to explain how the traumatic impact in their lives affected me. I still feel the rage and horror with each new revelation of the abuse children, men and women experienced in the Church and elsewhere.

At the same time I feel for the priests - as one priest friend said to me...

"I used to enjoy wearing my collar because people of all walks of life and every faith would feel free to say 'Hi Father' and stop to chat. Now - when people see the collar, they look at me with suspicion and disgust_ and walk wide of me." Many wonderful priests have suffered the pain and have the same anger as the laity does.

So the next step comes when some friends and family asked me... "Why do you stay in such a Church?" At first that startled me...I never equated the priests as the main hinge of my faith...

The Eucharist has been central to me always.... the many memories of my childhood in St. Mary's in Minoa- not just head memories, but felt memories that contain the Presence of God._These kinds of memories are renewed throughout the liturgical seasons. This is how I have grown to know Jesus - the human face of God._The scriptures touch my heart - the study of God and the liturgy and sacraments have been both my head and felt moments of Presence. But with hearing the question raised again recently- I decided to think more into it. First of all, where does one go to find a sinless community? After all, one can't build a wall to keep sin out!

Sin is pervasive everywhere because sin is an outcome of people's choices. Choices repeated lead to a pattern, / then to a habit, to an attitude and finally a value. These pretty much direct one's life. Sometimes we are aware of it and let it be - or realize "that" is not who we are and decide to change...starting at the beginning - the choices...to a pattern...to a habit, etc. Whether that be in a way we choose to redirect our thoughts - or our speech - or our simple daily actions. That is where it starts.

For all Christians - history has shown us how the centuries of war, power struggles and politics have separated us into groups... we have separate communities today - but ideally all ~ with Jesus as our focus.

For me - in today's readings I found all I needed to explain why I remain in the Church...

- 1- I look out at you- you have become my parish faith community. We ARE the Church - here. I have seen Church defined as
People on a journey to make God's dream for the world a Reality.
We make that journey together - in good times and in bad.

Let's look at that! How are we here- trying to make God's dream for the world -a reality?
Well, Let's look at the readings... We can't be the whole Church - the whole community of

people following Jesus... we can only be us here...so let's see if we fit the description given in our readings. We see in Jesus the most beautiful human example in today's gospel! Here is a deaf man - and of course he can't speak because he can't hear words... Remember: if you weren't perfectly healthy people of that time believed you or your parents were sinners and you were carrying out God's punishment. There was great shame attached! So being in public was as difficult for them as those who suffer from racism and bullying are for us today. Jesus knows this and so he takes the man away from the crowd. Obviously some cared for this man because they had sought out Jesus and believed Jesus would heal him.

So let's quietly follow Jesus and this man away from the crowd and off to the side. We see Jesus - gently put his fingers into the man's ears and spitting, touched his tongue. (It was a well known belief that spittle had healing properties in it.)

Watch now...See the man's face as he hears Jesus speaking - and tries to say those words back. I wonder what those words were.... He was an intelligent adult - now he could understand and learn to speak and for the first time, enter fully into the community!

We are told to live as Jesus - to Listen to Jesus - to see life as Jesus did - to try to know and understand people and their struggles. That is how Jesus revealed the total essence of God -

How Jesus looked at that man - grasped the pain of his special needs - realized his isolation and took him lovingly aside to heal him - to give him the respect and dignity due to him.

OK - Let's also look around our Church... Haven't we learned that from Jesus? Some of our members formed a committee that focused on where we as a community were making our parish accessible for all its members so that everyone could feel a part of the full community. The Elevator in the Bishop Harrison Center ~ the wheelchair available on a moment's notice. The parking places, our programs that strive to include everyone. I am sure this committee has an ongoing agenda to serve everyone.

Now Listen again to our reading from Isaiah ~ who tells us to open our eyes and be aware of the Presence of God everywhere and in Everyone and says: **Be Strong - Fear Not - Here is your God - God comes to Save you...** and (God comes in us!)

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened!

How many people today say: "They can't see where their next meal is coming from?"

Ongoing leadership here heads up the monthly collection of food for the people in the Parkrose Community - so they can SEE and count on future meals!

Catholic Charities in our diocese reaches out to shelter the homeless and for the men of that shelter, leadership here has organized a monthly hot cooked homemade meal with homemade cookies - but it works because so many of our parishioners provide the food.

*Others donate to the Food Bank of CNY - to help others and especially the children who depend on meals in school and for the Food banks available around the county.

*Others serve at the Samaritan Center - * Others sponsor children in foreign countries so they can eat, go to school and have their parents assisted with their homes and jobs.

All of this - so the blind can see!

We are truly One with Jesus in the respect for Life... Our joining St. Lucy's in loving and helping the people Villanueva... has saved lives! How many lives of mothers and children have a chance now because of You!

We are truly one with Jesus in the respect for human dignity -as we joined with our Peter Daino to care for the lives of young men forced from their homes to the streets in Nairobi because they are gay. They have been given shelter, education and careers because of the care our parishioners have and give to support this effort. The same self respect that Jesus gave to the man in today's Gospel is the same respect we at all Saints believe is due to every human being.

The gift of our Congolese brothers and sisters has opened our minds and hearts to a wider and deeper understanding of the Body of Christ... We see in their lives the struggles they have lived through, the courage to move ahead and adapt themselves to a completely new culture, language, climate and country.

790 some years ago, St. Francis of Assisi heard God tell him "Francis, Repair my Church"!

At first Francis took this literally and began working on the structure of a church building in disrepair. But in time he came to understand the deeper truth. He saw the cultural abuse of the hierarchy.... and knew that was not what Jesus was about - in any shape or form.

As Jesus went to the margins to bring the love and dignity to the poor, the lepers, the women and children of His time... Francis went to them in his time. Many realized what he was about how he saw the Presence of God in everything and everyone... how he was drawn to an openness and a purity of love for others .. soon they were followers - men and women.

I wonder if that is the message for us today! God calling us to "Repair my Church"!

With our passion for what Jesus revealed as God's love and dream for us...

we can live our lives so that those deaf to this message may hear...
those blind to this message will see
those mute will join us in voice

Our lame hearts will leap like a stag because
We are alive ~ We are aware ~ We are committed ~ and ~ We will be true!

For that is the substance of our Eucharist!
Jesus was the bread broken and wine poured out
God gave God's self over to us...

We eat and drink that substance together - as One
and - as One - we Live as the Body of Christ - the Church...

We gather together in a little white clapboard church on Lancaster Ave.
but we are a **Global Church!**

We go out to be the Hands, the Voice, the Love and Strength of Jesus
in this city, in this county and across the world!

We Are the Church!

Why would I ever leave you???