

REFLECTIONS . . .

Spring 2009 Volume 23, Issue 1



The Way of the Cross

On I John 5:5-8

What makes up, what constitutes, community? What must be present, for there to be community? A modern author [Anthony Esolen] suggests that the answer is blood – that is, the willingness that blood be shed. “Without,” he writes, “without at least a principle of surpassing worth, without a single precious tradition that you would, if necessary, defend in blood, your own or another’s, you have no community. You may have, if they are wealthy and pudgy and silly, a group of affable people who will not obstruct one another’s selfishness.” Given his druthers, the author concludes, he’d rather live alone on a mountain than endure that.

It is not, then, a theological abstraction for which St. John battles when he insists that, when we speak of Jesus, it does not suffice to speak of water – cleansing, refreshing, revivifying water – nor does it suffice to speak of spirit – especially if we mean the spirit of this or that age. No, to understand Jesus, and to understand Him as the basis for the community, for the Church, we must know that blood is involved: we are a community because someone, the man Christ Jesus, God incarnate, shed His blood for our sake. The Cross was not a road-bump, an obstacle, on the way to Redemption, it was the means by which Redemp-

tion was accomplished. To say with St. Paul that we were purchased at a price is not an abstraction, but a concrete program, a program that demands that we be willing to sacrifice even our selfishness so that others might be freed from their sins.

-Fr. James, OSB

*Station 4
Jesus meets His Mother*



St. John Bosco – a saint you should know

“Anyone who welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me” (Mt 18:5)

Whenever our liturgical calendar calls for celebrating the memorial of a saint, I frequently like to sit back and visualize what life was like during the days when that saint lived. For example, on March 3, the feast of Saint Katharine Drexel, I like to reflect back on my own life and what I was doing on March 3, 1955, the day she died in Bensalmen Township, Pennsylvania. I was living in Chicago while America’s future second citizen saint would be on her deathbed after living for 98 years and serving Native and African American peoples with her fortune and dedicated apostolic activity.

What was going on with the monks of the newly established Benedictine Priory in Chicago the day Saint John Bosco died, January 31, 1888 at the age of 72? I would imagine it was an ordinary school day at St. Procopius College on Allport Street, with some 43 students, looking forward to the celebration of the first anniversary of the school’s founding on March 2. It was probably a very busy day at the parish that counted over 4,000 families, Czech immigrants trying to establish a new life in Chicago’s developing neighborhood.

A reflection of this kind helps me visualize that across the ocean from Turin, Italy, here in Chicago, Illinois, Frater Procopius Neuzil, O.S.B., and some five priest-monk helpers were forming young students with some of the same methods and goals that Saint John Bosco used in educating young people with the help of his Salesian community confreres.

Just what were John Bosco's ideals in youth formation? The program centered around three points, Reason, Religion, and Kindness, much the same spirit that animated the founders of Saint Procopius College. The abbey's centennial history reports some of the reflections of the first student—only eleven at the end of the 1887 school year that began the previous March.

The celebration of Saint John Bosco's memorial gives us all that opportunity to look back and see the work of our own "saints" for youth—providing a strong academic program of Reason, Religion, and Kindness. One hundred and twenty-one years later, our community members and their lay associates face a lot more than the original three—Joseph Sklenar, John Lorenz, and Charles Novak—but we can thank God for the graces provided to us over the years that allowed our monks to have the strength to follow the command of Christ and receive the children in his name, and in this way truly receive him.

This memorial, as is the case with the memorial of any of God's saints, provides the challenge to hear the command of Christ. We remember that we are all that Christ has! Christ depends upon each of us to bring his love to the world. The "yes" that each one of us gives allows the Gospel to be preached to the ends of the earth!

-Fr. David, OSB



Station 5
Simon of Cyrene carries the cross

Book of Job

Fr. Robert Barron is the primary source for the ideas contained in this reflection.

Those who believe in God ask why God allows so much suffering?

John Stuart Mill who died in 1873 is still remembered for his challenging response, which is his argument that God doesn't exist. He comments that God is presented as all powerful, all knowing, and benevolent. Therefore, God knows about it, has power to do something about it, and being benevolent would certainly want to do something about it. Since he doesn't, he doesn't exist.

It is very likely that most people have not even heard of John Stuart Mill and are not aware of his reasoning, but they are probably in sympathy with his thinking. They experience the pain of suffering and, like Mill, question God's benevolence.

Today we read from the Book of Job, the most profound book of the Old Testament to deal with pain and suffering. To prove that Job is a loyal creature, God takes away Job's home, children, livelihood and health. Job responds with a great lament:

*"Is not man's life on earth a drudgery? ...
I have been assigned months of misery..."*

Most people of the world identify with Job. All of us at some time feel this in physical pain, sickness, depression, loneliness.

Job shifts his attention.

*"If in bed I say, 'When shall I arise?' then
the night drags on; I am filled with
restlessness until the dawn."*

That's a common experience, lying awake at night with our mind considering and re-considering our difficulties. Every moment we are more awake.

In our gospel reading, a large crowd of people suffering like Job come to Jesus: "...they brought to him all who were ill or possessed by demons." All are coming to Jesus. Suffering humanity is coming to Jesus. He cured the sick and drove out the demons.

Job doesn't understand his suffering, so he challenges God, telling God that he's done nothing wrong, he's done nothing to deserve all this suffering. Speaking out of the whirlwind, God answers Job. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding... Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?"

Through these and more such questions God makes it clear how little Job understands. Job's suffering is small relative to the entire story; it's like reading a small paragraph in a large book. We find it violent or hateful or full of pain and conclude that it makes no sense, that it has no useful purpose. On the basis of such a small portion of the book we are not in a position to say that it has no purpose. We can't say much about the suffering in our life until we come to God's perspective, a view of the whole.

Now this makes sense but it is not satisfying. We are still bothered by our suffering which is out of proportion with whatever evil we did in life, so we look for insight to Jesus curing the many sick and driving out the demons of those who come to him. He speaks with the authority of God and lets his divine power flow out of him. In Jesus God becomes flesh. In Jesus God becomes healer of suffering in the world. Through his power the blind come to see, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, and we are moved to ask why he does not cure all the blind, the deaf, and the sick?

Our answer is in the gospel reading. There we encounter God in solidarity with those who suffer. He came to take on the agony of the human race by entering our suffering. He takes on all of our psychological pain and our physical pain. He does not get rid of all suffering, and from this we conclude that suffering has a place in the story.

God is all powerful, all knowing, all benevolent, but God does not remove all suffering. By being in solidarity with us he is telling us to live with it, to grow and develop with it, because it has an important place from a perspective that you and I will not share until death. We are to accept this because we do not see the whole story and we live with the promise that God will heal everything in God's time. God is in solidarity with our suffering and that is sufficient for us to live without challenging the reasonableness of suffering. We need nothing more. We accept suffering because in Jesus Christ God did not escape suffering. In Jesus, God has suffered with us, and that is sufficient.

-Abbot Dismas, OSB



*Station 8
Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem*

*Station 10
Jesus is stripped of His garments*



The Bible, Praying, and Living

If anyone has ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit is saying (Rev 2: 71). What is the Spirit saying to you now? The Holy Spirit is calling you to think, to reflect, to pray, and to act.

The Christian journey is not an immediately gratifying, a right-now type of experience. It's not what our culture, our society, is today. The journey with the Bible goes against the flow of what we see daily around us. The question, "What can the Bible do for me?" should have an additional phrase added. That phrase is, "over time." The feedback we get, the growth we experience is a process that occurs slowly, sometimes imperceptibly. Since learning is a gradual process, and yes, sometimes a frustrating one, patience is an essential ingredient to keep in mind. Yet, to answer the question posed above in a sentence: If you're faithful to it, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, will transform you!

What should you bring to this book? Well, you *do* bring all the burdens of your life, all the emotional and psychological difficulties which weigh you down. Bring them honestly – but then listen to God. Respond to God with your heart and soul rather than your questioning, scientific, culturally-formed self. Most importantly, do not let your response be superficial, lukewarm, half-hearted. Rather, let it be deep-seated, rooted in your honest feelings, the result of rumination, confidence, and prayer. May it also be an exercise in getting to know yourself better than you already do.

Everyone is to contribute to the human community according to the ability/talent received. This spiritual journey allows us to make that contribution. So, stand in poverty in front of the One Who loves us. We are weak and are in need of God's patience, guidance, and mercy! The Bible will form us if only we let down our guard and allow God to fill our lives.

-Bro. Guy, OSB



*Station 11
Jesus is nailed to the cross*

Rejection

*Three bits of Scripture for your prayerful thought:
Jer 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Cor 12:31-13:13; Lk 4:21-30*

Laurence J. Peter wrote a book The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong. The book sold over 8 million copies and was a best seller for several months. Before the manuscript got published it was rejected 29 times. Abraham Lincoln was defeated 7 times for elected office before he was elected as President of the US. Vincent van Gogh earned \$85 for his paintings during his lifetime. One hundred years after his death, just one of his paintings was sold for \$82.5 million. I think it is safe to say that these three men knew the feeling of rejection.

Jeremiah was destined to the office of prophet before his birth. Jeremiah objects, he tells God, “Lord, I know not how to speak; I am too young.” God, in essence, says “nonsense!” “To whomever, I send you, you shall go; whatever I command you, you shall speak. Have no fear...I am with you to deliver you...” God is always honest and lays his cards right out to be seen for he tells Jeremiah that this commission will not be a piece of cake, “They will fight against you...” Jeremiah will come to experience and know rejection.

Jesus just finished reading from the prophet Isaiah, which describes the time of the Messiah. Jesus proceeds to give a homily as we heard again today. At first the people “were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.” But just as quickly they turned against him; why they know him and his family, who is he to talk that way! To make matters worse, Jesus goes on and compares himself to the two great Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha. That was more than the people could take; they became enraged, they seized him and took him to the brow of the hill to throw him down from there.

Luke is giving us a preview of what will happen at the end of Jesus’ ministry: the angry crowds, his being led to a hill outside the city of Jerusalem, and there dying on the cross. Again, a story of rejection.

Rejection strikes at the very core of our being; we fear it, no one wants to experience it, so we struggle to be accepted. As a result we often compromise our values, our bodies, even our faith.

The Good News reminds us today that we don’t have to fear; we are not walking this path alone. As God promised Jeremiah, “I am with you to deliver you” – and as the Father sustained Jesus unto life everlasting, so he does for us. For God’s love for us is not just a gong booming or a cymbal clashing, it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, to endure whatever comes.

-Abbot Hugh, OSB



“...by Your Cross, You have redeemed the world.”

The Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord

There was a time, until a few centuries ago, when the Christian world would have marked March 25, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, as the beginning of the new year. Rather an awkward arrangement, moving, say, from March 24, 1648, to March 25, 1649; but it made both logical and theological sense.

Beginning in the early Middle Ages, Christians thought it appropriate to divide human history into the time before and the time after the moment when God chose to enter history as a human being. Thus arose the practice of marking which “year of the Lord” (Anno Domini) it was – how long since the Virgin Mary had said “yes” to God and the Word had become flesh in her womb.

If the structure of the calendar be such as to measure the years of the Lord, then the date of his Incarnation would seem the proper day to begin a new year. And it also set apart the moment at which God took flesh as the central point in all of human history, the event from which all other events would be measured just as it is the event from which all of history takes its meaning. A more secular age would judge this method to be impractical, but the old custom did say something about the importance of this feast.

Brother Guy Jelinek, O.S.B.
Director of Vocations | St. Procopius Abbey
5601 College Road | Lisle, IL 60532 | 630-969-6410
gjelinek@procopius.org | www.procopius.org