

Daily Reflections by S. Rea McDonnell, SSND

Sunday, February 19, 2012

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 43: 18-22, 24-25; Psalm 41; 2 Corinthians 1: 18-22; Mark 2: 1-12

What is the newness that God promises through Isaiah? In the gospel, Jesus tells a paralyzed man that his sins are forgiven. But isn't God always saying that? Isn't Jesus always embodying God's kindness and inclusion of sinners? What may be new is our Yes to forgiveness. Jesus, Paul writes, is himself the Yes to all of God's promises, God, the faithful one. Mary said her Yes, and now, Paul reminds us that it is only through Christ that we can say Yes, Amen to the glory of God. And what is the glory of God? Not sickness, paralysis, fear, sin, but wholeness and peace. "The glory of God is the human being fully human, fully alive" (St. Irenaeus).

What in your life paralyzes you? What do you fear? What keeps you from being fully human and fully alive? Give all of that to Jesus. He doesn't want just our good works but our sin, our failure, our disappointments, weakness and fears. He says Yes to us as we are. Pray to accept his acceptance.

May we like those who observed the healing of the paralytic be amazed and glorify you, our God. May we give you joy by our becoming a bit more human, a bit more alive today.

Monday, February 20, 2012

James 3: 13-18; Psalm 19; Mark 9: 14-29

The gospel story reminds us of the raising of Jairus' daughter a few chapters earlier. Here it is a young boy whose father pleads for him, and Jesus casts a demon out of the child. "Most [of the crowd] said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he was able to stand." This week's gospels will frequently focus on children. There are thousands of children roaming the world, homeless, refugees, orphaned, starving. Let us dedicate our intercession this week to remembering them, praying for them, and finding some way to help alleviate their suffering.

Look in your imagination at the children wandering the streets of the richest countries in the world, picking in garbage cans to stave off hunger. Look at the children of the Sudan running from civil war that has plagued them since 1983. Look at the girl babies left out to die, and the boys trained as soldiers when they are 10 years old. See Jesus take each one by the hand and lift each one up. See each child standing, fully human and fully alive. This is contemplation too.

Jesus, hear our prayer, receive our fasting and alms for these least of your brothers and sisters, these tormented children of our world. Thank you for loving them and comforting them.

Tuesday, February 21, 2012

James 4:1-10; Psalm 55; Mark 9: 30-37

James asks, Where do conflicts and disputes among us come from? So many of the children of this world are at terrible risk because of conflicts, wars, violence in the streets and in their own homes. Cravings and greed, James answers his own question. Thousands of children are being sold into slavery, trafficked for work or for sex. Jesus sees children as the antidote to

greed and power struggles such as his disciples engage in. He takes a child in his arms and instructs his friends: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me..."

In our prayer today let us welcome children. Imagine your arms large enough to gather in all the children of the world. Your arms and Jesus' reach out. Do you want the Muslim children, those with running sores, the emaciated, the dope addicted, the lice-infected children? Talk with Jesus about your fears and hesitations. Ask for the gift of welcoming anyone whom you meet today.

Welcome, Jesus! You are welcome in our world and in our hearts, no matter what form you take. Baby Jesus full of sores, five-year-old Jesus being used for sex, ten-year-old trained to toss a grenade-- welcome, Jesus!

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Ash Wednesday

Joel 2:12-18; Psalm 51; 2 Corinthians 5: 20-6:2; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

Just as Advent begins the church new year, so today begins another kind of new year: a turning with even more of our heart to Jesus who speaks to our hearts through prayer. We are older, wiser and more full of grace (not because we are "more good" but because we have more capacity) than we were last Ash Wednesday. "Now is the acceptable time," Paul proclaims, quoting scripture, "Now is the day of salvation!" Now we begin again. Dusty with ashes but equipped for mission, and that mission, Paul tells us in today's reading, is to be ambassadors of reconciliation. We are all called to re-commit ourselves to that oneness for which Jesus Christ was sent. Baptism commissions all of us to be instruments of reconciliation, unity and peace.

Ask the Spirit to show you how you, very specifically, might be an ambassador of reconciliation. Prayer is not only "telling" God, but also listening to God. First, do you want to be an instrument of unity and peace? Tell God your desires and hesitations. Then, ask the Spirit to teach you how you can be that ambassador today. Listen. With whom do you need reconciliation? If that person has died, speak to him/her now. Then listen. And those still alive? Might they be open to discussion? Re-conciliare in Latin simply means speaking again. Pray for the gift of someday being reconciled. And then there is the gaping wound of our world which needs so much reconciliation, unity and peace. Pray, both telling God of your concern, your hope, and listening to God's hope for our world.

Holy Spirit, deepen our desires to be one with Jesus this Lent, to accept our mission to be ambassadors of reconciliation. Make our world one, and let us be your instruments of unity.

Because, year after year, we hear the same daily readings during Lent, this year we will move day by day and verse by verse through the passion narrative of Mark's gospel, which is read this year on Passion (Palm) Sunday. We will use our regular format for the Sunday readings.

Thursday, February 23, 2012

Mark 14: 26

When they had sung a hymn (to conclude the dinner) they went out to the Mount of Olives.

For your prayer today, sing a hymn of praise and/or thanks for the presence of Jesus in your life. Then, using your imagination, enter the scene. After dinner, wiping your mouth and leaving your napkin at your place, follow Jesus into the garden. How are you feeling? How is he feeling? Ask him. Listen. Ask him to respond to you. Wait. Listen. And when he does share

his feelings with you, how will you respond?

The Word was made flesh! We adore you, O Jesus, for you are like us in all things. You share our feelings and this Lent, we ask for the grace to share yours.

Friday, February 24, 2012

Mark 14: 27-28

Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’” But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.”

When you are facing stress in your life, how do you handle your fear? Here Jesus takes comfort in scripture and in his hope for resurrection (taught by the Pharisees who believed in resurrection) as well as memories of the beauty of his homeland. This is no supernatural, miraculous knowledge. If that were so, he would not be like us in all things, needing the gift of hope. When you are stressed, what scripture comforts you, what hope reassures you, what memories give you courage? Share all this with Jesus and listen as he responds to you.

We are a scattered people, as well you know, Jesus. Yet you died to “bring all the scattered children of God into one new family” (Jn 11:52). Make us one, especially with those of whom we are afraid.

Saturday, February 25, 2012

Mark 14: 29-31

Peter said to him, “Even though they all fall away, I will not.” Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, this very night before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” But he said vehemently, “If I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same.

Look at Jesus looking at Peter. What does his look convey? When they all said the same, Jesus turns to look at them all. Will you be among them? For whom or for what would you be willing to die? Now Jesus looks directly at you. The he pulls you aside to speak with you about your fears and your courage. Let that conversation just happen in your mind and heart (actually your imagination, through which the Spirit can teach us).

Jesus, please en-courage those who deny love to their families, who hold back in relationships because of fear. We pray especially for those who abuse those whom they love.