

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Apr 12th 2016

“Lord, do not hold this sin against them”

As we continue to celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, these readings give us a one-two punch, lest we forget that Holy Thursday and Good Friday precede Easter.

In the first reading, Stephen does his best to pry open the minds and hearts in this group of elders, scribes and others. One could argue that he needed a better strategy! Who among us wouldn't be infuriated when confronted with the harsh truth of our self-righteousness, attitudes of entitlement and victimhood, and other variations of being “stiff-necked.” It is perplexing that Stephen imagines he will receive a different response from these people than Jesus did!

I imagine Stephen was consoled at the vision he received “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” Notice he didn't hear Jesus saying “Hey, you been livin' under a rock, Stevie boy? I tried that – it didn't work.” Such is Divine Patience. “...we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God...” I'm cheered that God has such patience with us.

I am in awe of Stephen's next words to the Lord, said loud enough for the crowd to hear “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” This is not passivity nor a submission to abuse. It is tragic that this violence was not stopped. But the murder of Stephen was not prevented, and I think there is something else to ponder. How might God have been active in Stephen's mind and heart? I imagine Stephen saw beyond the rocks, beyond the hateful words... and into the wounded minds and hearts and suffering souls from which they emerged. And knew he was one of them. Stephen did not have to judge, defend or hate. He didn't take it personally. "The light came into the world, and darkness did not overcome it."

I am not condoning or excusing violence of any sort, and we should prevent it or end it when we are able. Most of us don't face this kind of violence, but do witness or experience numerous slights, hurts, and insults in the course of any given day. Regardless of how we respond, these are always Good Friday moments... another little death of the “false self,” the ego; another opportunity to allow God to transform our hearts; to let go of anger, hurt, defensiveness. Can we see the wounded and suffering soul from which it arises?

This is not an act of will alone, but does involve our consent. From where do we receive such grace? “... the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world... I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst.

Lord, for today, may I desire the Bread of Life.

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