

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Nov 18th 2016

Never will I forget the Christmas party when I was six years old. It was every little girl's dream of 'fancy'! I remember the bowl of nuts. Each Advent season my mother would fill a bowl with all kinds of nuts and a nutcracker. That Christmas, I enjoyed the walnuts! The initial attraction was the fun of using the nutcracker. I cracked walnuts, strictly walnuts, until I had a decent pile of them.

Then, I ate them. Cracked more. Ate more. They were so sweet. Addicting. It did not end well for me. Soon the sweet taste became an intense sour stomach. It only got worse. How could something so good, so sweet make me so sick?

In chapter 2 of Ezekiel, the prophet, he speaks of being given, by Yahweh, a "scroll to eat", words he was to share with the Israelites. He ate it, "... was as sweet as honey in my mouth". The words of God are wholesome. In today's reading from the Book of Revelation, John tell us, "a voice from heaven (spoke) to me..." "Take and swallow it (a small scroll). It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will taste as sweet as honey". At what point does something that is actually sweet, sour? When does something joyful and delightful turn to ugliness?

In today's gospel of Luke, we hear the very familiar story of Jesus' seemingly uncontrollable anger at what is happening in and around the temple. Surrounding the temple was the market place – a gathering place for buyers, sellers, locals, strangers and foreigners exchanging money in order to purchase the necessary temple offerings. We can almost hear Jesus yelling above the cacophony of sounds – the hawking of goods, jangle of coins, banter and bartering, he-hawing of donkeys, joyful shrieks of children, and the friendly chatter of neighbors catching-up. Imagine the scene – jostling crowds everywhere. The odor of donkeys, dogs, & cats, garbage, refuse, even sewage. The scents of hard working men and women. General chaos and mayhem! Along comes Jesus – trying to be heard over the din.

What is the problem? It has gone on too long. Enough is enough! The temple was once "...a house of prayer... now a den of thieves". How did this happen? We have always come here to shop, barter, renew friendships and of course, to worship. It didn't happen over night.

My bride, soft-spoken our wedding day, when did she become this nagging shrew? When did my one-a-night sweet drink become one sour bottle? When did our friendly gibes become hurtful remarks, accusations and bullying? When did I become a gossip? When did duly elected authority turn from concern for the poor and the common good to self concern? When did the homeless and the refugee become the untouchable?

When did the goodness and sweetness sour? Gradually, daily, ever so slowly. Imperceptibly. Right before my eyes. How did I not see "the face of God" or "hear his voice" straining to be heard over the din of my life?

Today we hear of Jesus' righteous anger. It was not one person but many who were responsible for the souring of the temple area. In our world it is not one but many of us who neglect of our planet, turn a blind eye toward the poor, the sick, and the refugee. It is I. It is many of us who mingle in our current market place. All of us have enjoyed the sweetness. I know at times my stomach has soured.

How many times have I heard of Jesus' patience and kindness? How many times have I heard God is "slow to anger and quick to forgive"? I have been encouraged time and again to "taste and see the goodness of the Lord." Our God is loving and gentle. My God has forgiven, comforted and loved me beyond my wildest imaginings. Still, today I am reminded that God also holds me accountable.

Today's Good news: God's words are "sweet honey" in my mouth.

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