

Homily for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 25-26, 2020

Readings: 1 Kings 3: 5, 7-12; Romans 8: 28-30; Matthew 13: 44-52

Preacher: Teryle Watson

The Old Testament reading today is rich and timely. In 1 Kings , God appears to Solomon in a dream. God promises to grant any wish that Solomon desires. Solomon asks for two things: an understanding heart so that he might rightly judge the people of God and the wisdom to distinguish right from wrong.

In this challenging time of worldwide pandemic, political unrest, racial tension and spiritual confusion I am called to examine my thoughts and actions in terms of the gifts given to Solomon. All human beings are the recipients of the powerful gifts of radical love and Godly discernment through the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

One of my favorite spirituals begins with, “Over my head, I hear music in the air.” That music is the constant murmur of the Voice of God within our souls. As an African American “cradle” Catholic, I walk in the footsteps of my lineage. Through the centuries my ancestors have participated in the work of reconciling the Gospel message of liberation with the horrendous reality of Black oppression and suffering.

The old spiritual, “Wade in the Water,” speaks to the healing, cleansing and “troubling” presence of God. God steps right into the mud of our lives and troubles it until we are in clear springs. This is the Wisdom of God in action. One of our newest saints, Congressman John Lewis, the civil rights icon, always exhorted his followers to embrace the righteousness of “good trouble” as a transformative response to the evils of society. “Good trouble” builds the City of God.

True to form, God approaches Solomon in a dream. Our Creator knows that we hear best when not distracted with earthly concerns. I need this reminder to create an atmosphere that allows me to hear, accept and respond to the Word.

The Year 2020 has been wrought with challenges. It has also called us to dream, pray and listen.

Humility is a mandate for the reception of the Word. We must be willing to be subject to the loving will of God. To seize the challenge and delight in the Ignatian Suscipe demands vulnerability. I posture myself with these words from a gospel song. "Lord, I'm available to you. My will I give to you. I'll do what you say. Use me, Lord. My storage is empty and I am available to you."

Love is the greatest liberator but it is birthed only through the greatest sacrifice and deepest fidelity. The Fiat of Mary and the Sacrifice of our Redeemer invite all of creation into the dance of a fruitful temporal life and entrance to the ecstasy of Eternal Life. I pray these words each day. They come from the gospel song, "Order My Steps."

Order my steps in Your Word

Order my tongue in Your Word

Wash my heart in Your Word

Guide my feet in your Word

Show me how to walk in Your Word

Show me how to talk in Your Word

When I need a brand new song to sing, show me how to let Your praises ring in Your Word.

Please, order my steps in Your Word.

African Americans have survived the conflict of the Promises of God and the treacherous reality of Earth through spontaneous prayer and song. The wood of the cradle and cross are emblazoned deep within our hearts.

Our good and gracious God judges with gentleness and equality. When we digress or fail, the Potter restores. As an African American mother of four cherished sons I fear daily for their lives. We are an endangered species in the eyes of too many law enforcement officers and agencies. My sons have been followed, blamed without cause and in one instance placed in mortal danger by a storeowner.

Imagine going out for dinner the evening before major surgery. I was anointed after morning Mass at Saint Augustine's. My beloved husband Bill gently wept as this was potentially serious. Later that morning we dropped off laundry and dry cleaning that we would pick up before heading out to dinner that evening. My four sons and husband were dressed in suits and ties. My husband and I remained in the car as my sons got out to pick up the clothing. Suddenly my husband and I heard a big commotion and witnessed people running out of the laundry as well as our sons. We heard a woman scream, "they have guns." To our horror we realized that she was referring to our sons, who were terrified. My husband approached the owner and asked what was going on. The response was that she was frightened when she saw four African American males enter at once and they were not smiling. My husband asked the age-old question, "How much longer do we have to grin and tap dance for you?" This is the constant war of the Gospel message upon the cancer of fear and hate. I cleave to the promises of justice but move through the world with great caution.

There is conflict with God's Word, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and the curious mixture of the Evangelical Right and too many who hold ecclesiastic office. The Word of God clearly tells me that all life is sacred and that it is our Holy obligation to respect one another from cradle to grave. The pro-life movement has members who claim that the occupant of White House is the greatest pro-life president ever. That confuses me as I never thought that the death penalty, mocking the marginalized, bullying the poor and sexual improprieties were pro-life. All life must be honored and justice should be equal and restorative. We must make prudent choices when the opportunity to vote comes in November. Strange alliances have formed. Order our steps, dear Lord.

So many of the sorrows of life, the ism's of life, could be eliminated if we had the 20/20 vision of God. I like to refer to this process as intentional intimacy, or, in the words of several authors, "into-me-see." In Jeremiah 1:5 we read, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born I consecrated you a Prophet to the nations." The incredible relationship that we share with our Creator starts before birth and comes with a unique mission that is individually designed!

The mandate to love one another must be fueled by intentional into-me-see. When we see each other as Divinely created, richly blessed and ordained for Mission, fear and hate cannot exist. The 20/20 vision of God is total love and acceptance. This is liberating vision that shapes radical love.

How we choose to react to people, places and things is one of our greatest freedoms. The thirst to honor the dignity of every living creature is the most radical and powerful gift of love. To see and honor the face of God in the dear neighbor liberates, empowers and reconciles. Sister Thea Bowman often said that we must know who we are and whose we are.

This knowledge allows us to dance with all of creation and the Lord and Love of our lives. We free the Eucharistic Table of the brutality of institutional racism and the wounds of bigotry. Misogyny would not be tolerated and used as the excuse to ban women from our place at the altar as a Priestly People. The LGBTQ community would no longer need to find safe harbor in a handful of accepting churches. No longer would they fear removal from jobs just for being authentically themselves.

We could find the energy and courage to build safe housing, provide excellent education to all, establish and implement those elements needed to ensure physical safety, spiritual growth, affordable health care, justice, comfort, support and a hopeful future for everyone.

Two powerful Gospel songs speak of the urgency of this time: "Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning" and "Sinner Please, Don't Let This Moment Pass." Both remind us that our time here is short. Our commitment to live in covenant with God has a time line. May we find the strength to use wisely the great gifts passed on to Solomon. May we allow ourselves to be broken so that all may be whole. May we see with the 20/20 vision of God as we continue to build our ancient but ever new Church.

