

Homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 17-18, 2021

Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2: 13-18; Mark 6: 30-34

Preacher: Sr. Karen Dietz

In a prayer attributed to the late Pedro Arrupé, SJ we read these words:

*Falling in love will decide
what will get you out of bed in the morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.*

I work at Bethany House, an emergency shelter for homeless women and children in Rochester. At least once a week a parish or high school or volunteer organization comes to the house to prepare our evening meal. Very often, these generous cooks prepare more than we can eat, and we have found that the women in the house are not big on leftovers. A few weeks ago, when faced with this situation, the guests and staff struggled with the thought that food would go to waste, especially at this time when so many are hungry. They ended up putting individual meals in packages and literally taking them to the streets—offering food to the many homeless in our neighborhood. This went so well, it has become a regular practice.

In the Gospel today Mark tells us that Jesus was moved with pity when seeing the crowd gathering, hungry for the Word. The translation offered us by Eugene Peterson in *The Message* says, “*Jesus’ heart broke at the sight of them.*” Seeing the abundant food on their table and the many hungry people on the street, the women at Bethany House had their hearts broken. Jesus began to teach immediately, knowing the desires of the hearts of those gathered and later in this same passage we learn that he also gave them food for their physical nourishment. He saw their many needs clearly. The Bethany House community imagined a way they could address a need in their neighborhood.

What is breaking your heart these days? As I experience life in the city of Rochester, my heart is broken by the daily reports of yet another homicide and incidences of violence. I cannot fathom the pain of all those affected by the condominium collapse in South Florida—those in the collapse, their families and friends, many of whom are still awaiting news of their loved ones, and the many who are doing the painstaking work of recovery. I am also heartbroken as I hear reports of the fallout of the pandemic; politicizing the vaccine and efforts at health and safety, the vaccine shortages in so many countries, the continued incidents of illness and death and the economic challenges that face so many.

As believers, it seems to me that we are called to offer our hearts for the breaking over and over again. The psalmist reminds us that “if today we hear God’s voice, harden not our hearts.” Instead, we ask God to soften our hearts so that we might be able to respond with compassion as we hold the many hurts in our world.

If you are like me, the list of what breaks your heart can be overwhelming. There seems to be so much, and the temptation might be to close our eyes, ears and hearts and fold in on ourselves. We find it hard to imagine a way we can make a difference in the face of all the pain and suffering. In the Gospel, Jesus does not take on all the individual concerns of the crowd that is gathered – though I am confident he is aware that there are a great many needs among them. He does ONE thing—that for which he was sent. He teaches them and brings them the good news. He does not ask the disciples to take individual orders like waiters, but to simply seek out the food available and make it accessible to everyone—just ONE thing. My friends at Bethany House saw a need and knew they had a partial solution—they could ease the hunger of a few people for ONE night. They did not concern themselves with solving hunger and homelessness for the city of Rochester. They felt there was ONE thing they could do, and they did it.

Let us pray for one another, that our hearts might be broken open for the sake of the world, that we might have the courage to name ONE thing we can do, and that we do it!

The end of the prayer from Arrupé says:

*Fall in Love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.*

I pray we each fall in love anew every day and that we allow that love to be our guide for all we undertake.