

Homily for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 28-29, 2021

Readings: Deuteronomy 4: 1-2, 6-8; James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27; Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Preacher: Sr. Barbara Staropoli

The words of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) describe for me what it feels like to live in our world at the present time:

I am praying again, Awesome One.

You hear me again, as words

from the depth of me

rush toward you in the wind.

I've been scattered in pieces....

I yearn to be held

in the great hands of your heart—

Oh, let them take me now. (Book of Pilgrimage II,2)

The longing expressed by these words seem to me to echo the experience of many of us these days. The turmoil that surrounds imbues every aspect of our lives, personal as well as communal. We long for the assurance of God's presence at the very depth of our beings so that we can encounter the tidal waves of life with courage and learn the skills needed to navigate their challenges.

"Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you," James tells us in the second reading. Planted in you—in your being—beyond book-knowledge, beyond words. God's life is written on our hearts. Discovering what that means for us is an inward journey that requires attention, silence and time set aside for a "rendezvous with God," in the words of James Finley.

Our readings today challenge us to that deep inner life, directing us to do justice that is rooted in the awareness of God's presence and love in our lives.

In the first reading, Moses directs the people to *listen*: "For what great nation has its gods so close to it as the Lord, our God is to us whenever we call...." God close to us? What does it mean? How do we recognize the presence of God? How do we respond each day? Do we respond? To do so requires a habit of recollection and awareness.

Jesus, in his condemnation of the Pharisees who mocked his followers for not washing their hands before they ate, shows us the depth and challenge of the call to respond to God. The outward action means little if it comes from a shallow motivation. "Nothing that enters one from outside can defile...but the things that come out from within are what defile." How do we make interior room for goodness, peace, justice?

The answer seems to have something to do with learning to make a space within our hearts – a space of silence connected to our breath—that brings us to our center where we can encounter the Source of our Life. Taking time for prayer, for solitude, for silence are essential for us these days. This kind of practice helps us to live from a center of peace and awareness. What God asks of us now in this difficult time is to mind the inside of our hearts. It is what comes from within, as Jesus tells us, that shapes us.

What our world needs now are people who can step back, who can see through the anguish of this time to a place where there is peace. We need to be people who can respond to others out of hearts shaped in peace. We need to be able to bridge the many divides we experience and creative in finding new ways of being and acting with as one human family.

Taking time to simply be with the silence of God in our private spaces, in nature, in conversation with a trusted companion, in solitude—these shape us for the challenges we face today. Words are not always required. In this way we can live in peace within ourselves—and learn the insight needed to face the many challenges and problems that are beyond us to solve. We learn to go within so that we remain aware of the Word who dwells with us and truly live out what it

means to “humbly welcome” that life-giving Word. What comes out of the person, then, becomes a grace-filled action, a loving response, a peaceful acknowledgement of God’s life of love within us.