

15th Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A

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We begin our reflections today with the fascinating Reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans 8:18-23. He speaks of creation as straining to give birth, as longing and struggling to be free. He is thinking of nature, but, more importantly, of people throughout history, for we human beings give conscious expression to the striving that exists all around us and of which we are part. Wherever Paul looks he sees people, whether they know it or not, longing for that special freedom which comes with communion with God. This is experienced as a longing for life, for love, for meaning, for peace, for harmony and wholeness. He is reflecting on the immense surge of creative energy that people everywhere exhibit as they respond to this yearning to transcend themselves in love.

Saint Francis of Assisi stands out as a saint who felt this wonderful harmony between his soul's yearning and that of creation. Saint Bonaventure, one of his disciples, wrote in his biography of Francis: 'Aroused by all things to the love of God, Francis rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands. As a manifestation of God, creation brought Francis great joy, and took him to its life-giving principle and cause. In beautiful things Francis saw and fell in love with God who is Beauty itself and through the signs of God's presence imprinted on creation Francis followed his beloved everywhere. For Francis all things were a ladder by which he could climb up and embrace him who alone could satisfy his heart' (Bonaventure Life of Francis IX,1).

The longing of which Paul is speaking is a longing for freedom. But what a price freedom demands! It can be found only in a transcending of self in love, and who wants to do what is demanded if we are truly to transcend the insecure and demanding thing we experience as 'self'? Who is going to dare to face the impotence, and the shabbiness, and the folly of much that we experience as our 'self', and let the hidden self grow strong? Who is going to let go and allow God to make of us what God wills: a channel of love and peace that 'works' only so long as we are open to the Source and continue to call on the life-Spirit whose breath alone sustains and nourishes us?

We are willing slaves to 'decadence', and its fascinating and distracting allurements continues to entice us. Do we really want to be free? The only way is to let God reveal us as his 'sons': that is, to see ourselves, women and men alike, in **the** Son, Jesus. It is Jesus who shows us who God is and he shows us how to be free as human beings, and how to remain free, come what may. But who doesn't want to duck or bypass the cross, or shift ground when things become uncomfortable?

It is here that the First Reading (Isaiah 55:10-11) is important. The exiles ponder the amazing fruitfulness of nature when cared for by God. The authors are trying to inspire their contemporaries to open their lives to the nurturing of God's Spirit. Their words come as a conclusion to the magnificent hope that stirred their hearts. Jerusalem had been destroyed, and the king, along with all the other leading people of Judah, had been taken into exile. There seemed very little reason for hope. They had lost their land – the Holy Land of the promise. They had lost their temple, and with it what they had always taken as the visible sign of God's

presence among them, as well as the cult through which they gave expression to their faith and worship. Yet, providentially, while many seem to have given up their faith and melded into the surrounding culture, there were those, including the author of these words, who, deprived of all visible supports, cut through to the heart of their faith. They had nothing to rely on now except God and God's fidelity to his promise. The will of God will be done. If we want to be part of it, we can be, **if** we share the faith expressed in this first reading. God's rain is not wasted. In time the harvest will come. So it is for every word that comes from the mouth of God. So it is for every promise God has ever made us. Our longing is meant to be fulfilled. But we must be patient and believe.

The Responsorial Psalm is one of the finest descriptive passages in Hebrew poetry. The author is making the same point as the prophets. Let God care for you. 'The eyes of the Lord your God are always on the land, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year'(Deuteronomy 11:12). In the same way, and with greater love, His eyes are upon us for he delights to be with us (Proverbs 8:31)

So we come to the Gospel (Matthew 13:1-9). A parable is like a shaft of light breaking through the clouds of our accustomed thinking. The shock is in the final words. Sure, much of the grain is lost – which is to be expected granted the necessity of paths and of stones to terrace the sparse soil on the rugged slopes. But surely the point of the parable is that the grain is such that if even a little bit gets into good soil the harvest will more than make up for all the lost grain. So 'Listen, anyone who has ears!'

In other words, it is never too late to listen. We may feel like the Jews living in exile. Nothing has worked out for us. We are failures in our own eyes and in every one else's perhaps. We have squandered grace. We have not really listened to God's word. Our prayer has been formal and our heart distracted. Okay, says Jesus, then listen now! The soil of your mind and heart is still good: God doesn't make things badly! So start now, today, this Sunday, and let the word in. Listen now, because you still have ears to hear and because He who is speaking to you now loves you and wants to capture your heart, even now. Whatever of the past, if you long now for a harvest of love it will be given to you, for God can create out of nothing, so long as we say yes and so long as we let go of whatever it is that is holding us back from receiving his grace, whatever is blocking the spring that is striving to well up inside us.

The psychiatrist Gerald May has this advice for us: 'Find your heart as best you can, follow it towards the source of love as much as possible, consecrate yourself, and trust. God's grace is present, God's love is irrevocable, and you can trust it and trust yourself within it. There are no exceptions. There are no places inside you or in the whole of creation where God's love does not exist. It is always crying out to your heart, and your heart is awake, responding. Seek this love and trust it'(The Awakened Heart, page 244).