

Reflections on Sunday's Readings: June 9, 2019



Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-11

I Cor 12: 3b-7, 12-13

John 20: 19-23

Becoming a "Sanctuary" Church

Introduction

This week I was very much taken by the images of the 90-year old veterans returning to Normandy for the 75th Anniversary of D-Day. I was also moved by the rows of grave markers for the many men and the four women in the Normandy cemetery.

I was also moved by the words of Sharon Eisenhower, the granddaughter of General Eisenhower, as she relayed some of his thoughts about D-Day. She shared that his words were that "those who died here and throughout the war, gave the world a 'second chance,' a second chance at freedom and democracy." She added that it is important that we not squander this 'second chance.'

David Brooks and The Second Mountain

In a new book entitled The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life, David Brooks, a social commentator and writer, offers that the motto of this WWII generation of men and women – many of our parents and grandparents – was "We're all in this together." They pulled together to pull our world back from fanaticism, fascism, and dictatorships.

Following WWII, especially beginning in the 1960's in the USA, there was a shift among much of the population to focus on ourselves as individuals and to be free from any "dogmas," regulations, or guides – political, economic, social, or regarding group expectations or conformity. The motto here Brooks suggests is "I'm free to be myself." This shift in perspective shows up in liberal groups and in conservative groups. This focus on the individual has led to the privatization of meaning and the dream of total freedom from restraints or social

conformity for the individual's pursuit of happiness and success. We now in the USA see ourselves generally as individuals first, and community is seen as "a collection of individuals who are making their own choices about how to live" (Brooks, 10).

Hyper-individuality

This shift in perspective has been evolving over the past fifty years in the USA so that now we have a culture of "hyper-individuality." These values of paying attention to ourselves and promoting our personal freedom taken to the extreme lead to people being loosely attached to others and to greater loneliness. This movement in our society makes it harder "to live bonded, communal lives" (Brooks, 13). We've lost a sense, generally, of seeking to know and build the common good and to trust the wisdom and experience of individuals and institutions regarding the common good. We'd rather "learn on our own" and guide our lives on our own; and we often promote this outlook with our young.

Feast of Pentecost

The Feast of Pentecost – the gifting of individuals and of the community with the Spirit of Jesus, the Risen One – speaks to the balance of the empowered and graced individual, bonded with others, in a common destiny and mission. The Feast of Pentecost reminds us that we are called by God, by the One who has made us and gifted us with our talents and energy, to use all we are for the healing and protection of the human family and of the beautiful cosmos we call "home."

This feast brings home to us that we are beloved sons and beloved daughters of a Good God; and thus we are beloved brothers and sisters with one another, with all who live. We've been given by God this "beautiful garden" of all creation to develop and watch over for the good of all. We're called by God to build a viable and nourishing home and web of relationships together here that will last into eternity. It's not about "me." It's really about "us" together. We have a vocation from God that knits us together.

Our Gospel Today

This message is deeply at work in the Gospel we heard today from John. This text has been used in the past to substantiate the grace and action of the Sacrament of Penance when it was under attack during the Reformation. In this context this passage was given a more "juridical sense" seeing the role of the priest as a judge of the sinner's spirit of repentance.

But deeper studies of this passage have brought home that something else, something deeper is going on; and it is not about judgement.

What Jesus is doing in enduring his unjust death and crucifixion, which is evil, and his coming back to the early community of men and women disciples through the Resurrection – is offering the community of believers a way to break the "scapegoating" of others, especially innocent victims, that can take hold of us in the human family. Instead of judging and condemning others, as is our wont to do, Jesus – the most innocent victim -- offers forgiveness and peace, a forgiveness and peace that the world cannot give. What Jesus is doing in this first Pentecost is

overwhelming the early disciples with forgiveness and peace that comes from the loving heart of our God that sets them free from guilt, anger, and judgement, hopefully once and for all. But at least he hopes to begin this “Pentecost process” of compassion and mercy in us – toward ourselves and one another -- so we do not need to take our anger and pain out on one another!

Jesus **“breathes”** on the first community of disciples and on us in every generation -- his energy, this personal presence of his own Spirit, so we might be filled with forgiveness and compassion, understanding, courage, and all the gifts of his Spirit. So we will live in a way different from the world’s ways.

Jesus’ hope is that we will become a community of **“sanctuary,” a saving and healing place and communal presence of second chances, of forgiveness, and of renewal.**

Try to imagine what we might look like if we take on Jesus’ Spirit and become this saving and grace-filled community: a community that offers understanding and presence to those who have failed and made mistakes; a community that welcomes and accompanies those hurting from divorce and are considering a second marriage; a community of Jesus’ disciples that makes room for young people struggling to understand themselves in light of their sexual identities; a community that walks with those struggling to be free from addictions or who feel different or wounded; a community willing to accept and offer hope to a couple who chose to have an abortion but are now striving to be whole again; a community willing to provide a safe place for those who have experienced domestic abuse and a secure path of rehabilitation for the abuser

Can we grow to this proportion, to this capacity to en flesh the wide and understanding heart of Jesus the Christ? This is the “Pentecost journey” we are called to as individuals and as a community of faith for the “saving” and healing of our world. We need one another to be able to grow in these ways ... to en flesh forgiveness and peace as we accompany others on their journeys. We need, and we are given the very Spirit of Jesus the Christ for this purpose.

John 20: 23

Sr. Sandra Schneiders, IHM, STD, a New Testament scholar who has studied John’s Gospel especially, offers that a translation truer to the meaning of the text of John 20: 23 ... the final line of our Gospel today ... would be: **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven them. Those whom you embrace or hold fast are held fast.”** Here is our calling personally and communally. Let us walk with and support one another on this “Pentecost journey” we share.

Resources:

David Brooks, [The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life](#) (New York: Random House, 2019).

Sandra M. Schneiders, IHM, [Jesus Risen in Our Midst: Essays on the Resurrection of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel](#) (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013).

Fr. Henry B. Beck, OFM / St. Francis Retreat House, Easton, PA.