

## Reflections on Sunday's Readings: July 21, 2019



### Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Genesis 18: 1-10a

Colossians 1: 24-28

Luke 10: 38-42

### *Real Presence*

#### Introduction

This weekend, as I was reflecting on the readings for today, a part of our Franciscan spirituality “clicked” for me. I am so grateful when this happens.

St. Bonaventure and several other Franciscan writers talk about a “coincidence of opposites” in life. They are pointing to the “side-by-side-ness” in reality of opposites or opposing energies like good and evil, compassion and violence, innocence and woundedness, health and sickness, and joy and despair.

Life, reality ... is a mixture of these “opposites,” and this can lead us to say that life is meaningless or it has no direction. Life seems to just be random experiences.

But our faith experiences and the witness of Jesus and other believers offers that there is meaning and direction to life and reality even though there are these side-by-side opposites in life.

### **The Witness of Jesus**

In fact, Jesus ... taking on our humanity and living through these opposites, just as we do, all the while believing in the Gracious One who sent him ... is our source of hope and trust that life has meaning and direction even though we experience these oppositional pulls in life.

Jesus also gives us through his life, death, and resurrection ... the pattern for us to follow in life. Jesus embraces life with all of its contradictions, its pains and sorrows, and its joy and beauty, trusting that the source of life and reality is the One he knows as Abba, an intimate, loving, merciful, non-violent, and compassionate God.

Jesus, rather than trying to set aside evil or ostracize evil-doers, encounters these forces and persons in ways to tame them, to transform them, and to understand them. He processes these forces inside himself, and he engages them in the outer world. All through his life, Jesus meets others that we might run away from; and when he faces his own suffering and death, he goes forward into them – trusting God’s presence and grace with him.

### **Positive Responses to Life**

Jesus never punishes others; but instead he engages others, names truth, always tries to include others, and to offer them the love they need to change and be transformed. When I am attacked, I often want to attack back; or sometimes I want to retreat into a corner for a while. Both are “reactions” instead of healthy responses. If I am feeling wounded from life or from others’ interactions with me, I often project this ‘woundedness’ out to others. I am seeing more fully that I need to “pause” when I am feeling a “reaction” coming on in order to be able to gain the insight or energy to “respond” instead.

As one spiritual writer offers ‘the pain that we do not transform, we will transmit.’ Jesus models for us this kind of non-violent life, this compassionate way of living ... to the end. And his resurrection tells us that this is truth. This is a true way to live.

God can hold together and transform the “opposites” we experience in life. God can restore and heal us. This is the work our God is always about.

### **Our Gospel Story Today: Real Presence**

This, I believe, is the power of the message of the Gospel story today about Jesus visiting the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. As a way into this story, I came upon the description of a new icon painting of this Gospel scene. It is by Claudio Pastro, a Brazilian artist. He has created a unique icon of Mary, Martha, Jesus, and Lazarus.

Jesus is seated in the middle of the icon with his left arm around the waist of Lazarus who is standing on his left. They are friends, and this gesture speaks to their friendship. Martha is standing on the right of Jesus, whose right hand is raised in blessing. Mary is seated on the ground at the feet of Jesus.

In this icon Martha's face is full of tenderness as she holds out a bowl of steaming food for them. In this icon, Martha's stance and the movement of her hands make her appear most like Jesus. Jesus lived a very caring and active life, and Martha's stance reflects this activity of Jesus. There is a sense of balance in this icon.

So what is Jesus saying in this Gospel passage? It seems most deeply that Jesus is addressing Martha's being so harried in her preparations for hospitality. He is inviting her to know that what is most important in this moment of hospitality is "communion." What Jesus wants most in these moments is to be "heart to heart" with those around him. Jesus wants "real presence" with all of them as he visits, and he is inviting Martha to open up some psychic or heart space to receive his peace and presence and for her to be herself with him.

Mary is soaking up this "real presence" with Jesus, and Jesus is inviting Martha to come into this experience of communion also.

It's important to realize that the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, was a "home-place" for Jesus. He has been here before, and they are friends together. You can see this in how freely Martha speaks to Jesus to direct Mary to help her, and so Jesus takes this friendship moment to invite Martha into deeper intimacy with him and with the others gathered together.

This is what this new icon expresses: the harmony and communion of each one being received and being themselves in this experience of communion and real presence.

### **Luke's Church and Us Today**

Another layer to this Gospel story is that Luke is writing this reflection in his own time and experience. He likely has in mind the "house-churches" where the early Christians are gathering for prayer and community. Just like today, there can be many demands on our time and energy for ministry and service. Jesus is reminding us, through Luke, that what Jesus wants most with us is **real presence, real communion, heart-to-heart knowing of one another**. In these moments of deep "hospitality" and knowing of one another, we are healed, reconciled, and able to deal with the oppositional forces in our lives. These communion moments open us up to compassion, to softness and mercy with ourselves and with others. This is the transformation that Jesus wants for each of us and all of us together.

### **Conclusion**

During this Eucharist let us remember that what God wants most of us is real communion and real presence. Let us open ourselves up to this "heart-to-heart" engagement with our God here today and trust together that these moments of communion do transform us to bear with God the pain and suffering in our world.

Resource: Mary McGlone's commentary for July 21, 2019 in "Celebration Publications" at [celebrationpublications.org](http://celebrationpublications.org). Mary offered the image of Claudio Pastro's new icon here.

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