

Reflections on Sunday's Readings: November 24, 2019

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe [C]

2 Samuel 5: 1-3

Colossians 1: 12-20

Luke 23: 33-43



“Today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Introduction

Our deeply inspired stories in the Book of Genesis speak of Paradise, the place where the first humans, Adam and Eve, enjoyed a profound intimacy with God when they walked with God in the cool of the evening. We also hear in these stories about the vulnerable openness that Adam and Eve felt with one another, and they were not afraid. They were naked before one another, and they felt no shame. They felt close with God who accompanied them, and they felt a partnership or beloved companionship with one another also. As the Scripture says they were “suitable partners” for one another, and they experienced a peaceful mutuality with one another.

Out of their beloved partnership and companionship with one another they formed a union with each other so deep that they were one body. All was seen to be very good and sharing in God’s goodness. These images point to the communion and life we are all called to know and share with one another.

What is most deeply in Jesus' heart

This is the “reign,” the kingdom that is in the heart of Jesus. Jesus knows the reality of this Paradise from his experiences in the heart of the Trinity. Jesus comes to us from his life in the Trinity where he knows the generous love flowing through “Abba,” (the Father), himself, and the Holy Spirit. This “Paradise” reality is what the Trinity wants for all of us to know and for all of us with creation to share in here on earth and in the life to come. This love in the heart of the Trinity is what the Trinity wants all of us to know and dwell in always.

This is the “kingdom” or “kin-dom” that motivates Jesus’ words and actions as he lives his life here among us on earth. Jesus is preeminent among us as the source and as the guide home to this Paradise that God hopes for and intends for us and all of creation. Jesus truly is the “Alpha” (the first) and the “Omega” (the last). Jesus truly is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ to make manifest God’s desires for creation and to empower us to help this Paradise, this “kin-dom,” this communion to happen here on earth and to draw us forward to its completion in eternal life, in Risen Life.

What is this “kin-dom” like?

At the heart of this “kin-dom” is **love and forgiveness** which we hear about in the Gospel today. In fact, one writer says that the most gentle, and I would add the most humble, line in Scripture is the one that began the Gospel today. “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23: 34). It is hard for me to imagine that Jesus on the cross is able to say this. This painful experience on the cross is something that he has resolutely moved toward, especially in Luke’s Gospel. He has known what is coming, this brutality and death; and yet he still is able to lovingly speak these tender words about us. In this tenderness and love Jesus makes fully manifest what the heart of God is like and how much God loves us.

Love is “sacrificial”

We know a part of love is to **sacrifice** ourselves for those we love. We give of ourselves for those we love that they might have life. You spouses and parents know this well. The journey of love is always about giving ourselves for the good of the other, and it never ends. We see this especially today when adult children come back home at 28 years old. It often literally never ends! Love can also call for “tough love” at times, but this too is giving our lives away for the sake of another.

Love is also forgiving

There is also in love a **forgiving** element, a making room for another to grow or for ourselves to grow. I love that at the heart of the meaning of the word “salvation” is the understanding to “make space.” God makes space for us to grow, to make changes, to mature; and this gives us the energy and the grace to offer the same to those we love.

On the cross

This is what Jesus is doing on the cross. The real miracle here is that Jesus, who is fully human along with being fully divine, has opened himself up to the Spirit of God so profoundly that he gives everything for us. He is willing to go the last mile, out of love and forgiveness, to express

his love (and the love of the Trinity) for us. He wants to send forth the enduring love and forgiveness energy of the Trinity into the human family and into creation. Imagine if you would, a wave of the Holy Spirit's energy of mercy, loving-kindness, and reconciliation moving through all who live and all of creation. This wave of love and forgiveness heals us, reconciles us, and brings us into the communion of love in the heart of the Trinity. This is the energy, the compassion energy and loving-kindness that can and will transform us in the human family along with all of creation, along with all of the cosmos.

And we have been baptized into this love and this forgiveness energy of Jesus the Christ in order to pass it on, to be co-creators with God for God's kin-dom here and now and to come.

Conclusion

One spiritual writer offers that the deepest and primary "faith question" in us ... deeper than our theology questions and conversations ... is: 'Is God trustworthy?', 'Can God be trusted?', 'Is God for us?'

Jesus, giving himself completely in love for us on the cross, answers definitively: yes! The heart of Jesus ... and the heart of the Trinity ... is always for us, and full of forgiveness for us. We must be sure to get this right: the mystery of the cross is not about a sacrifice being needed to please an angry and judgmental God. This is an unhelpful and actually harmful way of talking about this mystery.

The mystery of the cross is about God's own self-revealing: revealing how much God loves us. The image of Jesus' arms outstretched on the cross is our God saying 'I will never stop loving you.' 'I am always for you.' 'I love you completely.'

And the Resurrection tells us that this love at the heart of Jesus and at the heart of the Trinity cannot be held in the grave. This love is infinite and stronger even than death. The mystery of the Resurrection also tells us that when we live like Jesus ... "full out" in love ... we will be held by God, and we will rise in God's love.

God promises to lead us into Paradise where all of our sufferings and crucifixions in this life will be healed and transformed into risen, infinite life.

This begins now and will come to completion in the heart of God.

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Happy Thanksgiving to all!