



Come and See!

July 29, 2018

The Word...

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks,
and distributed them to those who were reclining,
and also as much of the fish as they wanted. ...
When the people saw the sign he had done, they said,
"This is truly the Prophet, the one who is to come into the world."
Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off
to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.
(from Jn 6:1-15)

Pondering the Word...

Oh, I love how the Spirit works! I am currently helping to develop weekend retreats I will offer with others at an Ignatian retreat house not far from where I live.* The theme of the retreat is "God's Dream," and in my research, I came across a provocative book, *The Dream of God*, by the late Episcopalian theologian and lay preacher, Verna Dozier. The main focus of the book is how far we have strayed from God's dream for the world, modeled for us by the life of his son. We have sanitized and institutionalized faith, making God's kingdom into a kingdom of the world, with all the trappings of a worldly kingdom, and Christ as its king—the very thing Jesus runs away from in today's gospel.

"Jesus did not call human beings to worship him, but to follow him. The church missed its high calling to be a new thing in the world when it decided to worship Jesus instead of follow him." (p. 74) Dr. Dozier does not dismiss worship, but says that if it is not in the service of strengthening our discipleship, it is pointless, or worse, blasphemous.

If our worship and prayers do not lead us to love and serve others—and as Jesus tells us, even our enemies—or, if our worship and service is solely for the purpose of gaining eternal life in the kingdom of God, we have missed the entire point of God's dream, made incarnate in the humble man from Galilee.

Living the Word...

While I find theological arguments and discussions thought-provoking and stimulating, they can also get in the way of God speaking to my heart. For years, the regal and distant image of Christ the King superseded any possibility of knowing intimately the Servant King who calls me to serve alongside him.

What is your image of Jesus? As an otherworldly Deity to be known after this life, or as a companion and guide on your journey here on earth? What do you believe is God's dream for the human race? What is God's dream for you? I invite you, not to abandon your worship—not by any means—but to spend quiet time not just listening to God's word, but living it; taking it into your heart, not examining it with your head; learning what Christ truly wants to be for and with you, not just what others say he should be. Take the risk. Withdraw to the mountain alone with Jesus and allow him feed you and speak to your heart.

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

* If you are interested in this retreat, go to <http://www.loyolaonthepotomac.com/retreatsprogram/ignatian-weekend-retreat-schedule/> or send me an email at the address below.

Jul 30: "...they have provoked me with their 'no-god' and angered me with their vain idols..." (Dt 32:18-19, 20-21)
This verse is from the Song of Moses, found at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a summation to remind the Israelites of all God has done for them, but also a prediction of what will befall them when (not if) they "spurn the God who made them." I was eager to see the Hebrew word of 'no-god' and surprised to see that it translates almost exactly: 'not El'--not God. In this context, God is referring to the idols and gods (Baal) to which they will offer sacrifice. Then, when they are suffering, they will have Moses' Song to remind them of God's warning. But it made me reflect: What are the 'not Gods' to which I sacrifice and offer worship? What are the things like productivity (or more often, busyness), accomplishments (and the resulting ego gratification,) etc., that I let get in the way of God in my life? Spend some prayer time reflecting on the 'not Gods' in your life and how you might reframe them as an offering for the glory of the one, true God.

Jul 31: "Let my eyes stream with tears day and night, without rest, over the great destruction...If I walk out into the field, look! those slain by the sword; If I enter the city, look! those consumed by hunger." (Jer 14:7-22)

Sorry folks, but the lectionary is all about Jeremiah right now, and there's not much that's upbeat. This passage has made me reflect on the 'no-god' of busyness I mentioned yesterday. I'm struggling with "compassion fatigue." The stories of families torn apart, murderous dictators, school shootings, famines, floods, and the like have begun to dull my senses. I allow myself to be distracted by busyness rather than to take concrete steps towards change. Sound familiar? So I am taking a cue from Jeremiah: My prayer today is that God will open my eyes to stream with tears over the suffering of my fellow human beings; that I will stop throwing up my hands in frustration but will do something...anything to affect a change. How about you?

Aug 1: "The Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it." (Mt 14: 44-46)

This merchant has likely bought and sold many lovely pearls over the years—that's what merchants do. They are always seeking something better, more valuable. In the realm of faith, being a seeker is a good thing as long as the search (and the marketplace) don't become the gods, as long as we are not blind to the value of what we already hold in our hands. Perhaps you have deep longing to know God better. Seek him with an open heart, even if requires trading what you have for something better. Maybe the faith you have right now fills your needs and grants you great peace. Give thanks and be happy for the valuable pearl you already hold.

Aug 2: "Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel." (Jer 18: 1-6)

As is the case with most of the Book of Jeremiah, God's words here are to warn Israel to mend its ways. But as I read this, I am reminded of a quote by St. Ignatius of Loyola, whose memorial we celebrated this week: "There are very few people who realize what God would make of them if they abandoned themselves entirely to His hands, and let themselves be formed by his grace." Instead of a warning, think of this as an invitation. Let God make you into something much greater than you could ever be on your own, even if that means being reworked and remolded. Allow yourself to be clay in God's warm hands, formed by his grace.

Aug 3: "'Must I restore what I did not steal?" (Ps 69)

The psalmist has been falsely accused of theft, so his question is literal. Seems fair to me. Why should someone have to restore something...like God's dream for our world...or peace within a family...or harmony within a community...when he or she is blameless to begin with? Jesus, the blameless, came to reconcile us and restore our relationship with God. How are you called to be like him, to restore what you did not cause?

Aug 4: "...You who seek God, may your hearts revive! For the LORD hears the poor, and his own who are in bonds he spurns not." (Ps 69)

We spoke on Wednesday about seeking God. Sometimes, the search can be wearying. It can take a long time and be very frustrating. We may plead to God, like the psalmist in v. 14, "Answer me!" If you have been seeking God and not finding much encouragement, may your heart revive! If you find yourself locked in the bonds of grief, addiction, depression, or apathy, know that God will not spurn you. Continue seeking him with a sincere and humble heart. Know that you are one of God's own.