



Come and See!

Week of February 2, 2025

The Word ...

“And suddenly there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek,
and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire.
Yes, he is coming but who will endure the day of his coming?
And who can stand when he appears?
For he is like the refiner’s fire, or like the fuller’s lye”
(Mal 3:1-4).

“Because he himself was tested through what he suffered,
he is able to help those who are being tested”
(Heb 2:14-18).

Pondering the Word ...

I was kind of harsh last week and the words, “Comfort, oh comfort my people” (Is 40:1) kept repeating in my head. I know lots of people who need comfort these days, so I decided to be gentler this week. I turned to the readings for today only to come face to face with Malachi and his “refiner’s fire” and “fuller’s lye!” In the gospel, Mary having a sword pierce her heart! Great! So much for comfort!

Show of hands, please: How many of you seek or desire a Lord who will refine you by fire or put you through a wringer awash with lye? Just as I suspected! I don’t believe God called us into existence to have us suffer. Yet I know it has been through the trials in my own life (most of them self-inflicted) that I’ve begun to learn humility, patience, and resilience. I have learned what having faith really means. It is not a creed or statement of beliefs, but a living, breathing entity in my soul. I know this sounds like a platitude (and not something I would say to someone suffering), but, if we are open, our Spirit does grow and can soar through what Richard Rohr calls “the integration of the negative.”

Let’s take comfort in the words from Hebrews which assures us when we are tested, burned, at the end of our ropes, we have an advocate: our brother, Jesus, who has “been there, done that,” and has seen his Spirit soar!

Living the Word ...

If you are in the throes of difficulty, I pray the arms of the suffering Christ will embrace you and bring you comfort. If you are aware of someone suffering, do what you can to listen. You don’t need to—and probably shouldn’t—try to find anything to say. Let the comfort of your physical presence be a healing balm.

I find myself in many conversations lamenting the state of things. It’s understandable and people need to vent, but protect yourself and others, not by uttering platitudes or empty affirmations. Integrate positivity and lessen the negatives in your life. See tomorrow’s suggestions. Or volunteer to do something for someone else, but not with any goals or expectations. “A little help is a lot of help,” as one wise counselor said. Or as my wise mother always said, “You are your happiest in service to others!” Reaching out is the antidote to sorrow.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Feb 3: *“Let your hearts take comfort, all who hope in the Lord. You hide them in the shelter of your presence from the plottings of men; You screen them from the strife of tongues”* (Ps 31). The “strife of tongues:” What a great phrase! A play on words here: If we want to avoid “the strife of tongues” and the “plottings of men,” we had better put down our “screens” in favor of God’s comforting presence! **Provision: “Power down.”** There’s an old saying: *“What you focus on grows.”* It is difficult to avoid the fire hydrant of news spewing out all around us, but we need to shut down at times and walk away from the constant banter and strife. Negativity, uncivil discourse, and personal attacks become poisons that erode our spirits. Make a commitment to give yourself at least one day a week and replace the screen with some time in God’s abode within.

Tue, Feb 4: *““May your hearts be ever merry!”*(Ps 22). What a lovely sentiment! Such a lovely wish the psalmist has for us.

Psalm 22...let’s see...oh, it’s the one that begins with the line, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!” 😞 Many of the psalms follow this same pattern: ‘Where are you, God? I am about to be devoured, falling into the pit! Rescue me and I will sing your praises to the assembly, and we will be ever merry!’ This is an example of what’s called the *leitmotif* that runs throughout the Bible: falling and rising. **Provision: “Trust in the slow work of God.”** What an important lesson for all of us, especially our young people who tend to expect immediate gratification, immediate relief of any suffering. Consider praying de Chardin’s beautiful prayer, written to a young relative: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/prayer-of-theilhard-de-chardin/> or pray the psalms to remind us of the constancy of God’s saving hand.

Wed, Feb 5: *“My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines; he scourges every son he acknowledges”* (Heb 12:4-7, 11-15, from Prv 3:11-12). Ugh! I usually avoid this passage, but I want to share a story: Several years ago, I was teaching parenting classes to women in the inner city. I of course dismissed the use of violent physical discipline. One young woman came to me on a break and asked, “But if I don’t beat my child, how will they know I love them?” It took my breath away. I asked her if she wanted her child to be violent. She of course said no, so I said then she must not resolve issues with him using violence. We then discussed other means of punishment. **Provision: Violence is never of God!** There’s a lot to dismiss in this passage, particularly that God is responsible for punishment that happens to us. Yes, we suffer when we turn away from God, but it is not God who “scourges” us. The suffering we experience from our transgressions is more likely self-inflicted. We MUST demonstrate for our children and grandchildren nonviolent ways to resolve problems, including what we see in the media. *“To tolerate is to teach.”*

Thu, Feb 6: *“You have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering”* (Heb 12:18-19, 21-24). A good follow-up to yesterdays’ reflection. The author of Hebrews juxtaposes the fear and trembling of the Israelites in Exodus with the “festal gathering” at the city of “the living God;” Jesus’ blood of forgiveness and salvation versus Abel’s blood of violence and retribution. **Provision: What is your image of God?** Our image of the Divine has an enormous impact on our spiritual life; I think it is the most important aspect. Many hold onto the image of a punishing God...an “Old Testament God” (which is odd, because the OT has just as many positive, compassionate images of God). *“By his words and his praxis, Jesus himself changed the content of the word ‘God.’ If we do not allow him to change our image of God, we will not be able to say that he is our Lord”* (from *Jesus Before Christianity*, p. 166, Albert Nolan, O.P.). If a punishing God is what we learned as kids, that’s hard to get away from. Talk to a minister or director to help let that go.

Fri, Feb 7: *“Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves”* (Heb 13:1-8). Oh! This verse takes on a whole new meaning, a real challenge in an age of government-sponsored immigration raids! **Provision: Where will I be when the “rubber meets the road?”** I really need to pray about this. Am I willing, like Jesus, to take a stand against the law and provide shelter and comfort to undocumented people? Am I willing, like the brave people on the Texas/Mexican border to go to jail rather than to give up their God-given obligation? I am fortunate. I live in a state and county that *has* taken a stand against forced raids despite threats from the federal government. Will you choose the current law of the land or the eternal law of God?

Sat, Feb 8: *“Comply with and submit to your leaders, for they stand vigil on behalf of your souls as men who render an account”* (Heb 13: 15-17, 20-21, literal Greek translation). Well, given what we talked about yesterday, I had to address this one! I reference ten different NT translations; in four versions, the word “leaders” is “pastoral leaders” or “prelates.” Scripture scholars say the word as it is used here refers to religious community elders rather than the Roman government. Regardless, I remind myself that when I stand before judgment, whether that be Divine or my own accounting of my life, I will do so without a bunch of “leaders,” religious or otherwise, behind me having to render their own account and shaking in their own shoes! **Provision: Think for yourself.** It is well and good to pay close attention to our religious and secular leaders, but make sure to develop an informed conscience. Evaluate policies and doctrines based on your relationship with the Divine, not on a political label or religious affiliation. Imagine yourself in front of God: will you wind up saying, “Well, that’s what my leaders told me to do!” Or will you be able to “stand confidently before the throne of grace?” Which do you choose?