



Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time | February 11, 2018

Healing Our Wounds of Separation

By Mary Katharine Deeley

Teenagers fear an outbreak of acne before a major event. They're sure every eye will focus on a small blemish that seems enormous to them. Sometimes they even avoid going out at all until their faces return to normal.

They're fortunate not to be living in ancient Israel, where skin outbreaks and eruptions were likely viewed as leprosy. Public contact was forbidden. They'd have had to shout "unclean!" as they approached someone. Their exile would have been religiously regulated, and those they met would have avoided any touch.

The man with leprosy who approached Jesus wouldn't have touched Jesus—it was bold of him just to ask Jesus' mercy. In a move that surprised everyone, Jesus reached out to touch the one who was "unclean."

I can only imagine the man's shock and relief just at the touch of a person who didn't see him as less than human. The wound of separation was healed at that moment, and Jesus confirmed it by healing the man's body. Nor did Jesus stop there. He restored the man to his community by asking him to follow Mosaic Law (the Law of Moses) and be declared clean.

Teenagers often think their physical flaws are the worst things they can suffer. In truth, it's separation—whether it comes from within us or from others.

Jesus has the power to heal whatever separates us and restore us to community with God and others. +

Sunday Readings

Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

The Lord said... "[He] shall dwell apart, taking up residence outside the camp."

1 Corinthians 10:31—11:1

Do everything for the glory of God. Avoid giving offense.

Mark 1:40–45

"If you wish, you can make me clean."...[Jesus] said to him, "I do will it. Be made clean."

The best thing we can do to restore ourselves to community with God and others? Follow Jesus.

A Word From Pope Francis

[Jesus says] he is the real instrument of the Father's mercy, who goes to encounter everyone, bringing consolation and salvation, and, in doing so, he manifests God's justice. The blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf regain their dignity and are no longer excluded because of their disease.

—General audience, September 7, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How at peace am I with my own wounds, sins, and imperfections?
- Am I mature and free enough to ask for help and also reach out and help others in their moral or physical suffering?



“We should act as a balm for all wounds”

By Kathy Coffey

“Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

In a poll for the least-favorite Beatitude, this one might win. Our culture worships movie stars, sports heroes, corporate moguls—not saints. So why does Jesus proclaim that the persecuted are indeed blessed?

Jesus’ style is not to make rigid rules but to hold up inspiring models. He asks us to look with new eyes upon the celebrities we may have admired and find hidden virtues in people who are quiet, unpublicized, and principled. If we shift our sights, we may find them more courageous, uplifting, and creative than those who once received our adulation.

Relatively few North Americans have suffered the oppression that is known by those in Asia, Africa, South America, and Central America. In countries like Bosnia, Rwanda, or El Salvador, genocide is common, being a catechist is dangerous, and the mothers of the “disappeared” mourn their missing children.

You’ve had a glimmer of their experience if you’ve been the spokesperson for an unpopular, moral cause: the only ethical one in the department, the woman calling the Old Boys’ Club (or the Church!) to equality,

or belonging to any group scorned by authorities. You’ll quickly discover what it means to be “out.” While it pales beside the pain endured elsewhere, it teaches something about being ostracized for the gospel.

Bone-Deep Beliefs

Those who have undergone persecution are sustained by solidarity, inner freedom, and the knowledge that it doesn’t last forever. Standing with others who believe in the same cause, we at least are not alone.

The persecuted find intimacy with others that can surpass the idle conversations or superficial ties of secure relationships. Etty Hillesum, author of *An Interrupted Life*, died at Auschwitz at age twenty-nine. At the Nazi concentration camp she called herself “bread shared among the hungry.” Her journal’s last words resonate with compassion: “We should act as a balm for all wounds.”

At a deep level, the persecuted are united: Their relationships are based on bone-deep beliefs. Members of the armed services cherish wartime buddies. They put their lives on the line together. So our deepest affinities may be to those with whom we share unpopular beliefs.

Resting in Hope

From the writing of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Gandhi, or Óscar Romero emerges a sense of inner freedom. As the Gospel says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and

body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Like the early Christians, Archbishop Romero predicted he would outlive his own martyrdom: “If they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people.”

We learn from the persecuted how much in our lives is superficial, how little is essential. Those who have been deprived of everything material still find joy and fulfillment.

Finally, Jesus directs us to place our sufferings in an eternal context. The problem that looms large now does not last forever. The persecuted teach us to carry burdens lightly and wear our chains loosely. They take God’s mission on earth seriously but can laugh at themselves.

The persecutions we undergo may be less dramatic, but we can approach them with the same qualities. When we feel diminished by criticism, rejected by the “in” crowd, or demonized by those who disagree with us, there is hope. We can rest in Jesus’ assurance that we aren’t alone, the pain doesn’t last forever, and the kingdom is ours. +



Lord, your love transcends the boundaries of the human condition. Open my eyes to see your face in all people.

From Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time,

Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

February 12-17

Mon. Weekday:
Jas 1:1–11 / Mk 8:11–13

Tue. Weekday:
Jas 1:12–18 / Mk 8:14–21

Ash Wednesday: Jl 2:12–18 /
2 Cor 5:20—6:2 / Mt 6:1–6, 16–18

Thursday after Ash Wednesday:
Dt 30:15–20 / Lk 9:22–25

Friday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:1–9a / Mt 9:14–15

Saturday after Ash Wednesday:
Is 58:9b–14 / Lk 5:27–32