

INNER VIEWS - 1<sup>ST</sup> Sunday of Lent

Our Christian faith teaches us that love connects us to God and one another. And many of us have accepted love as a primary value in our lives. So what is it that hinders us from being the loving person we have chosen to be? The genius of Jesus' revelation is that we will come to God through the "actual," the here and now, or quite simply *what is*. God is always given, incarnate in every moment and present to those who know how to be present to the here and now. God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in the concrete incarnations of life.

At the same time we desire, we are tempted to pursue power, possessions and prestige as substitutes for God's loving presence. Even though this Sunday's gospel clearly sets us on a reordering of our values and priorities, and I'm sure we agree with the Gospel, why does it have so little impact in the way we live?

We might admire and love this Gospel but do not usually respond to its insight about the desire for power, possessions and prestige. We believe with our mind and our intellect but our heart does not completely believe. Although we say we believe we continue to desire power, possessions and prestige. And we strongly believe in the rightness of this desiring. We are neither motivated nor inspired to question these desires at a deep level. Our life is constructed of them, and shaped by them. And so, at this deepest level, we do not believe in Jesus' example, regardless of how much we love and respect him and want to be like him.

We have not experienced the truth that our desire for power, possessions and prestige disconnects us from love and is the root of our unhappiness. Believing the teaching does not make it a knowing for us. We cannot believe deeply because we have no experiential knowledge that these desires cause pain, we cannot see how this teaching is relevant to us and our life. The desire for power, possessions and prestige must become undesirable or feel alien to our personality before we will let go of it.

Conversion, the movement of love toward the Lord, is a process of disenchantment with the ego and its desire for possession, power and prestige. The only way we can ever be freed is to become aware of the pain (frustration) these desires cause. Only when we wake up to this painful reality will we begin find the need for something more satisfying. As St. Augustine said, "My heart is restless until it rests in you Lord."

(Note – the original version is much longer. If you would like a copy please e-mail me at [KCSsR@aol.com](mailto:KCSsR@aol.com) or call me at 312-642-2498). Ken Sedlak – PATHWAYS

From PATHWAYS A discussion of the meaning of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection based on chapter 3 of Fr. Ken's book "Why God Loves Us...No Matter What". 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 12, 19 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Lounge of the Parish Center. And after Easter a discussion of Eckhart Tolle's "A New Earth" led by Fr. Ken

INNER VIEWS - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent  
The Mountain of Divine Revealing

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As we continue these weeks of Lent we must keep the dazzling image of Jesus before us. It is Jesus' legacy to us, the beacon of our possibility. It entices us beyond the numbness of what seems to be our normal lives and awakens us to the gift and responsibility of divine partnership in bringing healing, peace, and justice into this world. For we too are meant to see ourselves mirrored in the Transfigured Jesus.

*One time Jesus took Peter, John and James up a mountain  
not to dazzle-dazzle them  
but because they were frazzled and needed prayer.  
“Up the mountain”, the place where God waits to be met  
but this time, not in a burning bush,  
this time in a burning man, a man on fire, glowing  
a glowing man, a man saturated with divine glory  
a glory to his Father  
a glory of his Father,  
his Father's glory,  
our brother in glory.*

*The glory also shone through the eyes of Peter, John and James  
they too were glorified, and they could see Jesus for who he was  
but they were still half asleep and missed that glory that gave light to their seeing,  
in their half sleep it seemed like a dream, or a vision at best.*

*They dared not look into the face of Jesus and see their own face reflected.  
They would cling to their sleep, until the nightmare of his crucifixion  
awoke them to the reality of our Father's love radiating in their glory.  
Their fearful bow kept their eyes down. Seeing the Father's glory would surely kill them.  
Jesus touched them on the shoulder. “There is nothing to fear in the Father of Love.”  
And so they heard but no longer saw:  
“This is my Beloved Son, hear him!”  
Let him awaken you to glory.*

*Then Peter, John and James fell back into our normal half sleep..  
They no longer saw the dazzle, their blindness returned.  
“Do not tell anyone what you saw – until my death and resurrection reveals it in you.”  
And they went back down the mountain, not sure what they had seen*

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INNER VIEWS - 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent  
The Woman at the Well

This is an icon in the spiritual sense. It is meant to draw you into a divine frame of awareness. The woman at the well is a story about opening the well of eternal life now. The one who is Living Water is providing divine life now. As soon as you open to this Gospel he is standing before you. “Give me something to drink.” He wants your attention.

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He is thirsty and tired. He has just been with Nicodemus who just isn't getting it. This depletes him. But when somebody allows him to give them "life giving" waters his thirst is slacked. He is fed by feeding others. He experiences love by being love. As the poet Rumi said:

"Not only the thirsty seek water,  
The water as well seeks the thirsty."  
Or as John the Evangelist tells us"  
"We love because first we are loved."

Here is the repentance, the turning around to see in a new way, the awakening to God's seeing, that Lent is bringing us to. We may seek healing and mercy because we are sinners who are afraid of punishment. But the deeper reality is that we seek healing and mercy because God is mercy being poured out to heal our wounded sinfulness. God is life giving water and we are made for drinking. Jesus is filled by giving his Father's love away – for free, no strings attached. God's joy is to soak us with life giving water.

This is about God's generosity and joyous love, not about our sinful unworthiness. We're gotten this all turned around. Pay attention to your thirst and you will find the living God. Seek water and Jesus will raise up living water within you. Life giving water is not a reward. It is love gushing from the heart of God and we have been created to drink it.

The first week of Lent told us about the desire for power, possessions and prestige. They are not evil in themselves, but they distract us from what we're truly seeking. In this Gospel the woman talks about her "husbands." And Jesus tells her, "the one you're with isn't your husband either." We humans tend to be seduced by the material world because it's so obvious and always in our face. We need to go inside our selves, to let Jesus lead us into the desert of inner silence, so that we'll be able to pay attention to our thirst and find our desire to drink of the love gurgling up from within.

I believe there's another reason we get distracted from God's lavish gift of life giving love. I find a great resistance to receiving God's love. I want to open my heart to God, but I feel an almost addictive need to make myself worthy so that I have a right to God's love. And, of course, God loves me with this need also, because it's just the way I am. When I'm with God in prayer, trying honestly to be myself, I keep trying to "do what's right." I look for clues to what God wants so that I can change myself and conform to them. And Jesus, God's flesh and blood and our brother, simply says "Give me something to drink. I'm thirsty." Can you believe that we thirst for each other?

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INNER VIEWS - 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
The Man Born Blind (John 9:1-41)

"The man born blind" is meant to be a symbol of the blindness we all share as part of our human condition. – a spiritual blindness. His cure from blindness is called a "sign" in this Gospel. That means it is a physical occurrence that helps us become aware of our need "to see" on a spiritual level. "Seeing" is an act of awareness, it's the ability to perceive ourselves as the "Beloved" children of God. The blindness of this man is an occasion for us to become aware of God's grace, God's love trying to break through our blindness.

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Notice that the incident throws the Pharisees into confusion. Is Jesus a saint or a sinner? They want to believe that he is a sinner because he broke God's rules and worked on the Sabbath. But his work results in a cure that only God could do. This causes confusion. Their way of "seeing" is in chaos, they can't make sense out of what they are seeing. Their attempts to reduce God to simplistic "good and bad" categories isn't working. But instead of dealing with it they want to blame Jesus – and the blind man, and even his parents. In their world of blame and judgment they need someone to attack for their own confusion. Jesus simply isn't playing by their rules.

Read this meditation below carefully several times:

You and I  
are swimming like fish in the  
the ocean of our nonconscious ideologies.

Did you catch the repetition of "the" at the end of the second line and the beginning of the third line? Many people miss this because our brains do not give us absolute reality; rather, they feed us an edited interpretation of absolute reality.

Now that you're paying attention to the way your mind works pay attention to what your mind is doing. It tries to cast the present moment in terms of what should be or could be. So – you're probably judging at this moment: "This is a waste;" "What's he talking about – it's not what I believe;" "This isn't the way I was brought up;" "I could be doing something else, somewhere else." This is just the way our mind works.

Unfortunately our mind is stuck in the past or the future and God is here right now. This is what Jesus wants us to "see." He is trying to get us to be present, right here, right now, without judgments. God cannot be confined to the categories of our mind. We can know God only through relationship, not through our thoughts. We'll never define God into our lives. But we can meet God – right here, right now.

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A fine resource for learning to be present, right here, right now is Eckhart Tolle's "A New Earth." PATHWAYS will offer a discussion on this book on Tuesdays, March 25-April 8 at 7:30.

INNER VIEWS - 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent  
Lazarus is raised form the dead.

The Gospel is the "greatest story every told" because it so totally engages the whole drama and promise of our lives. It ignites our imagination to conceive of our reality in richer colors and helps us become sensitive to the grand spectrum of God's presence in our life. It is the story of the triumph of love hidden even in the depths of catastrophe.

If, at times, the Gospels seem flat, could it be because we can't fathom the depth to which God has come into our lives? Can we really believe that God is here loving us when we feel so

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separate from God, from one another and even from our self. The good news of the Gospels is that God is not a sentimental, trivialized love, but a love in which the cross reveals God's vulnerability to our need.

In today's Gospel we are drawn into a story of God's presence in the most universal place of all. We find God wherever we find suffering. Suffering is everywhere, inside every group and religion. This means that no one group can take possession of God. There is no spiritual loyalty tests in Jesus' ministry. Not a single one of his healings or exorcisms depends on worthiness. Jesus responds with God's compassion whenever he meets someone in need.

In this Gospel Jesus enters the place of grief and death to reveal God's love. "When Jesus saw Mary weeping...he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved." He enters but not without cost. This wrong is not banished by a transcendent word of power. God doesn't work by conquering. This wrong is transformed by Jesus inhabiting it. Seeing Mary weeping he begins the movement of divine consolation and compassion. He is troubled, even anguished by the grief death has caused. He joins them in their tears for the only way beyond death and grief is through it.

The fullness of life in Christ is not pain and suffering avoided or denied. It is pain and suffering transformed, as the cross itself reveals. Jesus on the cross identifies with the human problem, the darkness of our wounded lives. He refuses to stand outside of the human dilemma. On the cross evil is not overcome by attack or avoidance but by union with our Father.

We who are baptized into the mystery of Christ find that this is the revelation of how our wholeness is created by our Father. When we feel fear we must learn to "suffer" our actual fear, taste the nature of our anxiety, get a sense of its texture and style, its falsity and disguises. We have to admit that we don't want to lost something, and admit exactly what that something is. Is it our reputation, our comfort, our place among our friends, our control? When we enter the reality of our fear, our weakness, we will find healing. We will find the compassion and love of our Father who, like his Son, always responds to need.

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INNER VIEWS: Passion Sunday: The Cross of Christ  
GOD'S RESPONSE TO THE SCANDAL OF HUMAN SUFFERING

If you've ever driven a winding mountain road you know that every turn opens up new vistas. And ever vista revels in a new panorama of beauty. There is something about this beauty that is both awe inspiring and hope inspiring. There is something about this beauty that makes your feel ennobled and humbled at the same time. Curve after curve, each revealing its distinctive beauty and eliciting your reverence as you drive into the splendor of the mountain.

I experience the cross of Christ in much the same way. Every curve in my life opens up new vistas. Some are very harsh as they reveal the violence of nature and human nature. Others take my breath away with the overwhelming panorama of the Father's passionate love and the Son's compassionate love for us.

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If you've ever, in the elation of the moment, tried to take pictures and capture the mountain's rugged presence and exalted beauty, you know how deflating the results are. Each turn of the mountain road exposed new surprises, while the pictures are flat and trivial in comparison. When we begin to meditate on Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection we face the same kind of dilemma. It's too much. Nothing can capture the fullness of its meaning or the depth of its impact on our lives.

When we look upon the cross we see God's heart laid open for us. On the cross we see God's compassion and determination to meet us where we are, love us for who we are and open us to healing and wholeness.

The cross is not a proof of God's love but a consequence of God's love and of the wound that all humans bear. The cross is the salve, the balm of healing that goes directly to the source of that wound.

The essence of the wound that inflicts us all is the illusion and belief that we are separate from God. This illusion makes us look to ourselves as the center of our lives, actions, and security. The fact is, God is the center; God loving us unconditionally and holding us in existence. Wherever, in any way we forget this, we reopen the wound.

The fullness of life in Christ is not pain and suffering avoided or denied. It is pain and suffering transformed, as the cross itself reveals. Jesus on the cross identifies with the human problem, the darkness of our wounded lives. He refuses to stand outside of the human dilemma. On the cross evil is not overcome by attack or avoidance but by union with our Father.

I believe a good way to understand this is to gaze upon the cross like you would an icon. There's no need to figure it out, the image itself will speak on a level beyond words. Follow St. Alphonsus Liguori's advice: "When you meditate on the cross of Christ do not think so much about the suffering but about the love with which he suffered."

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## INNER VIEWS

## Easter Sunday

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they are looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but that dawn.

G. K. Chesterton – "The Everlasting Man."

There is no insight, idea, feeling or dogma that can express the meaning of this tragic death of an innocent man. Nothing we use to interpret it is big enough to carry its meaning. Not grief, nor pity, nor compassion, not even outrage can contain the cross. We feel an echo of this in the death

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of our loved ones. No matter what we say to console ourselves, it is not enough, it's just something to say to keep our mind off the grief.

Paradoxically, when we are willing to accept the futility of any explanation, we can be drawn into the meaning of Jesus' living, dying and rising. In letting go of our minds, our feelings, our ego, our self as the source of meaning, we can surrender to the Father as our Source. With Jesus we find that we receive new life only by surrendering. We become, not "self-less" but surrendered. We are enabled to exist on a plain where our Father and our true self is free to come and go, to share an intimate friendship without restraint or fear. This is what Jesus' disciples found to be their truth.

On the cross the disciple' hopes for Jesus died. They had hoped for a powerful Messiah who could turn stones into bread and be protected by God's angels. They thought that they had attached themselves to a Messiah whose shirrtails they could ride into a new kingdom of riches, fame, glory and power.

When their hopes died their small self, their ego-mind also died and for the first time they were able to see and hear from their hearts. Their golden chain was broken along with their hopes. For the first time they came to know the hidden treasure of the Father's intimate and creative love bursting forth within them. They began to catch on that they too might be "My beloved child." And they rose with Jesus. For they too must wrap their flesh and blood around divinity so that they can carry on the work he began. Crosses stand all around us, shrouding our world, throbbing with the human wound, and aching for a healing heart.

"Why God loves us... no matter what" – Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R.

## INNERVIEWS

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart..."*

Notice that Jesus isn't asking us, "who labor and are heavily burdened" to do more. No's he's saying "Stop working so hard, set your burden down. Learn from me, I am gentle and humble of heart." Gentleness is the ability to find rest because we trust that God is holding us in existence and acting as the Wise Source of our development.

Here's the paradox. It's our laboring, our working so hard, our carrying around the burden of trying to be perfect, that stops our soul from being itself and becoming the resource its meant to be in our life. The intrinsic nature of the soul is to be pure clarity, transparency, luminosity, and awareness. The soul is our capacity to see things as they are. Our judgments blind the soul.

Jesus is the path of humble acceptance of God's love, rather than struggling to make ourselves lovable. This calls for humility because it means we have to accept our selfish, impatient, often recalcitrant humanness. And most importantly it means we accept that we cannot control every aspect of our lives. What a burden to think we could or should be able to control our lives. And what a relief it is to set this burden down.

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To find true rest is to give up the burden of being something that we are not and cannot possibly be. To find true rest is to give up the burden of finding our value, self worth in what we have and have accomplished. To find true rest is to give up the judgments we inflict upon others and upon ourselves for failure in perfection. To find true rest is to accept the gift and reality of God as the only true center of our security and value. This is the gentle yoke.

Again, the paradox, we take up the gentle yoke by letting go. When we let go we live in the moment, not feeling the pressure to achieve something, not thinking about winning or losing or worrying about acting foolish, breaking away from the neurosis of restraint or defense, enjoying the beauty of the moment yet not holding onto it, letting go without thinking about the need to let go, feeling the happiness without hoping for the happiness to continue, having no ego or attachment to anything.

When we begin to let God be the center of our self-knowledge we come to an awareness, no longer of limitation, but of burgeoning potential. It is not just fantasy, creating self-images that we pretend to be and strain to imitate. Instead we begin to experience ourselves as God's gift. Or, as Jesus says in today's Gospel, "*Father, what you have hidden from the wise and intelligent you have revealed to the infants.*"

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