

INNER VIEWS

BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTNESS
YOU WILL BE SATISFIED. Part 1

Righteousness means that we learn to ground our point of view in God's intimate presence and unconditional love. Matthew's Gospel (5:48) puts it this way: "You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is Perfect." This, however, does not convey its meaning very clearly. Ken Wilber teaches "It is not what a person says, but the level from which they say it that determines the truth of a spiritual statement." A spiritually mature person could use the word perfection and know they are talking about God's perfection abiding in us. An immature person will think of it as a moral achievement that they can attain by trying harder. A more accurate understanding of this statement would be "Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God is living toward you."

Our beliefs and moral injunctions become narrow and rigid if taken too literally. They are meant to point us to the inner reality of God's presence, loving us into existence and the Source of our loving actions toward each other. They bring us into a mystery we cannot possess but which we can only approach with awe, unknowing and only relate to with love. Our faith matures as we begin the transformation from an external approach to our beliefs and activities to an internal connection with the unconditionally loving presence of God as the Source of all that is good, satisfying, life giving, love giving and worthwhile in our lives.

We see this in Jesus' encounter with the rich young man. "What good must I do" the young man asks. And Jesus immediately shifts the focus from "what" is good to "who" is good. "There is only One who is good." Jesus tells him. It's not about you being good but about letting God be your goodness. (Mt. 19:16-22). The young man isn't ready for this and walks away. Jesus comments, "I assure you, only with difficulty will a rich man enter into the kingdom of God: it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eyes..." And when his disciples protest because in their minds riches are a sign of righteousness Jesus drives his point home with these wonderfully compassionate words, "For man it is impossible; but for God all things are possible." (Mt. 19: 23-26.)

Our goal is not personal or private perfection and wholeness, which is clearly impossible but has been held up to us as a necessity. Where the text finally points and leads is to the total mystery of divine union – and nothing less. Only those who have begun to experience God's desire for them as well as God's grace, forgiveness, love, union will live the prophetic call to righteousness appropriately. The call easily disintegrates into ego enhancement and ego ammunition instead of prophetic action.

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INNER VIEWS

BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTNESS
YOU WILL BE SATISFIED Part 2

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They shall be satisfied. Most Bibles to this day use righteousness to soften the justice to which we are called. Righteousness has a kind of "religious" feeling. But the word in Greek is clearly *justice*. To live a just life in this world is to live a life identified with God's kingdom which brings all of us together as sisters and brothers. We are partners in this

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

kingdom which means we have a creative and active role in providing realistic opportunities for all God's children. The prophetic call is to give our flesh and blood to our Father's plan for saving his beloved children.

This call is not about imposing our political or theological opinions any more than it is about denying the problems and looking the other way. It demands that we hold these seemingly opposites together long enough to see through them. This is contemplation. Righteousness is both a contemplative and prophetic, reflective and active calling.

A prophet must be capable of spiritual depth – and that always includes a demanding capacity for self reflection as well as a love for honesty. This happens through relationships, community and prayer all of which open us to a world bigger than our own mind set.

Prophecy begins at home; we must play the prophet to ourselves before we can dare to be prophetic for anyone else. And we must be able to challenge both ends of the spectrum, to continually remind ourselves that the cup is neither half full nor half empty. It's both at the same time. Reality cannot be reduced to simple either / or formulas. Definition makes for accuracy but not necessarily reality. The blessedness of this prophetic door opens to wisdom which is always more than mere facts. It demands transformation of consciousness so that we move beyond the dualistic win/lose mind.

Religion has always said that an authentic God encounter is the quickest and truest path to such wisdom it is the ultimate securing that allows us to creatively deal with the essential impermanence and insecurity of everything else. It is the changing of Reference Point that puts God first and then self. Once this happens everything else falls into its proper perspective.

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INNER VIEWS

BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THRIST FOR RIGHTNESS YOU WILL BE SATISFIED Part 3

Wisdom is responding to reality as it is, meeting reality in its most simple, immediate, and contradictory form. This meeting happens when we let go of our judgments and expectations.

Without prayer prophetic activists end up as ideologues. We're trapped in our heads, our opinions, our righteous selves. Maybe we're doing the right thing, but from an egocentric place, not a place of unitive consciousness, the place where God is our Source. In other words, even if we're doing a good thing the agenda is ours instead of God's.

The second temptation of Jesus in the desert illustrates this vividly. Satan takes him up to the pinnacle of the temple, symbolizing the religious world, and tells him to play righteousness games with God. Throw yourself off and he'll catch you (Matthew 4:6). The devil can quote Scripture with the best of us. This temptation is the need to be right and to think of our self as saved, superior, the moral elite standing up for God and our religion, and quoting Scriptures for our own purpose.

More evil has come into the world this kind of righteous ignorance than by people who have intentionally sinned. Being convinced that I have the whole truth and have God committed to my side, my dogmas, and my right response (I am baptized, I made a personal decision for Jesus, I go to church), is living in the

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

deadly desert of spiritual pride. The devil in this emptiness is the need to be right no matter what the truth is.

Pride separates. Love unites. Pride compares, judges, divides and rejects. Love unites, accepts, heals and welcomes the stranger in all of us. Pride is in the mind, which by its very nature compares and competes, judges and distinguishes. Love is our spiritual essence, which by its nature is unconditioned awareness and energy given freely for the well being of the other.

The hidden trap is this, if you decide to be less prideful you have just increased your pride. But if you recognize your pride without judgment, if you can accept it and let it connect you to God's love and mercy, healing begins.

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INNER VIEWS

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When God sees us in our pride God knows that we are becoming our own worst enemies, and we don't even know it. We are blinding ourselves to our need for God's love, God's healing, and God's presence. We are isolating ourselves by pushing one another away, as well as pushing ourselves away from our own reality. This leaves us feeling even more vulnerable and defensive. And so we climb up on a pedestal to gain the high ground while we close our eyes to our own faults. And God knows it's dangerous to stand on a pedestal with you eyes closed.

This is why love is the heart of our prophetic action. We need to reconnect, to turn back to God as our source. We need to trust Love instead of our ego and to accept our solidarity in humanness, sin, and redemption. We come to be thankful that God is God, and we are not.

Our Blessedness transforms to Beloved ness when we let God teach us to love unconditionally. We can't just learn on our own because unconditional love isn't native to our ego. Our ego is made to help us survive. And it doesn't recognize other possibilities. This is why Jesus tells us "You have to die to yourself to save yourself." Our ego is far too small for God, like a thimble trying to hold the ocean.

But when we are taught and learn to love unconditionally, to love God for who God is, without expectations, we'll experience the great gift, the gift that we've been wanting all along but couldn't recognize because our ego blinded us. We will be re-created as a vessel with room for all that exists, loving ecstatically and spontaneously. We will be a vessel without boundaries or shape, an openness to unconditional love and presence to God as God is.

We enter into this path of learning to love unconditionally, this apprenticeship to God, through prayer, through simply asking for the gift of love. The purpose of prayer is simply learning to be present to who God is. God is already giving us everything, already loving us unconditionally. This is the great surprise of the Beatitudes. They are the doors to our spirit. And when we open the door we find that God is already here. Prayer connects us to the living God, who is far more than any of our points of view. In prayer God will teach us to be open and honest, to see through our agendas and limited perspectives

In prayer we will meet a God unlike anything a god is supposed to be. He doesn't answer every desire even when we work hard at placating him. His only consistent quality is to love us intimately. The more we fail, the more our wound shows itself the more he reaches out to us. This is the ultimate liberation of

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

blessed righteousness. It liberates us from our expectations so that we can participate in all of life, in the real world as it is.

From this vulnerable position life itself will always be our teacher. In this Reign of God there are no liberals or conservatives, males or females, Greeks, Jews, Gentile or Muslims. In God's Kingdom life and earth, success and failure, loyalty to what is and risk for what needs to be all embrace one another. We are being asked to live in the mystery that bears all of them. We are being removed far away from religions convention as a excuse for conservatism, fundamentalism, or political correctness of any kind. Real Christian orthodoxy accepts the paradox of holding together all those things that normally seem incompatible.

KEN SEDLAK C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

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When our ego is involved the most incompatible realities are other people. We find our prophetic and blessed self only through the way we live within the community of our brothers and sisters. Our nature is to belong. Being human requires more than one. We exist only in relation to others. Our life is created by others, our identity is discovered in the mirror of our relationship to others, even our name comes from others. Sharing our reflections with is a powerful and vital part of engaging our spirit in the flesh and blood of our lives.

Rather than asking why we need community it may be more important to ask how we need others. Spirituality's answer to that question is that human beings need each other precisely in relationships of mutuality. Mutuality is the awareness that life's most precious realities –love, wisdom, joy- are attained only in the giving of them and are given only in the openness to receive them. This is the heart and soul, body and blood of Jesus' message. We need one another. There is no gift without a giver and a receiver. Love thrives in giving and receiving.

In relationships of mutuality we give by getting and get by giving, recognizing that we truly gain only what we seek to give and that we are able to give only that which we have already received. Even our relationship with God becomes real only in relationship to one another. *“Love consists in this: it is not we who loved God, but God loved us and sent his Son to heal our sins,, if God loved us so much we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but as long as we love one another God remains in us and his love comes to its perfection in us.”* (I John 4:10, 11)

The spiritual aliveness, the healing and redemption that we are all looking for happens only in a community of love. This community of love is spiritual above all in its earthiness. This is not a place of angels and pure spirits, filled with sweetness and delight and heavenly bliss, but a very fragile place, a vulnerable place, a place of loss, a place where wounded and sinful people seek to receive and give the love that heals. Community is the realization that we are bound together by our woundedness and separated by power, prestige and the need to control.

Our need for mutuality arise from our very woundedness and imperfection: it originates in the fact that by ourselves we are never enough. The mystery in which we are all immersed is that loving is an experience of God (1 John 4:8). Love becomes a way of life because, in God, love and life are two dimensions of the same reality: *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8). The joy of life comes in loving.

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

God's basic building block for passing on his love is not the "saved" individual, or the rightly informed believer, dedication to ministry, or even accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, but precisely the journey and bonding process that is vital to marriages, families, tribes, nations, peoples, and churches who are seeking to involve themselves in his love. The body of Christ, the spiritual family, is God's strategy. *"May they all be one... so that the world may believe it you who sent me...that they may be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me"* (John 7:21,23) As we share our different perspectives and experiences we discover a shared unity. We are in this together with our spouses, our friends and the God to whom we belong.

KEN SEDLAK C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

. "Humans do not live by their possessions alone." Luke 12:13 ff

The Gospel story of the rich man who hoards and hoards and then suddenly dies is just as easily found in our morning papers. Accumulation of wealth, capital resources and good insurance is no guarantee against heart attacks, cancer or traffic accidents. And yet its an illusion that at times deludes us all - material resources means security. No wonder the first commandment is about idolatry (Deut. 5:6). When God is first in our lives everything else finds its proper place.

Three weeks ago in the Gospels, the lawyer knew the answer but not how to live it: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (Lk 10:25ff.) The only true and lasting treasure is the personal happiness and peace of mind that comes from deep communion with God and genuine, self-surrendering community with fellow human beings.

Greed is a form of idolatry that makes love impossible. This is what Jesus immediately perceives in today's Gospel. Instead of dividing the inheritance between the two brothers, he focuses on why the inheritance has divided them. Instead of attacking and judging them he tells a story, which invites them to draw their own conclusions.

Wealth is something that we can possess and save up. But happiness, true friends, meaning in life and the security that comes from being eternal are not commodities that can be bought, saved or hoarded. They exist only in the present moment and they exist as a side effect of the rest of our way of life. This is Jesus' basic point in this story.

Jesus is not saying that wealth and God are in opposition. We need money to help us get some of the basic necessities of life. But money can't gain for us what really matters. These come from knowing God's unconditional love in our lives, treating one another with this love, and finding the meaning that comes from living in this way.

God rarely appears in parables, but he appears in this one and calls the rich man a fool. The rich man is a real idiot, a word which comes from the Greek, *idiotes*, meaning "the one who is alone." Although made in the image of the Creator, the rich man does not live as the creator does who gives himself to his creation. An idiot is one who has everything but finds himself alone because of it. As the Russian proverb points out, "Where there is too much something is missing." Wise people give the gift that continues to enrich them - love. Love can't be stored up. The only way to hold onto it is to give it away.

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

But love must be lived in the concrete reality of our lives. We are not pure spirit. We are spirits who express ourselves in physical ways. We are embodied spirits. We need beauty, and some comforts, food and exercise, but most of all we need to be loved and to be loving -we need God and each other.

Notice the way Jesus lives. He gathers people around him and loves to dine with them. He does not judge these people or exclude any of them from his table. He enjoys a good meal and the companionship that goes with it. This is the basic way he reveals his Father's Kingdom coming alive in this world. Gratitude and generosity are the basic ways we take part in God feeding his children with love.

We are divine/human beings made to find our happiness and joy around our Father's table. We are sisters and brother's of Jesus, called to give our love with the same gratitude and generosity that he does. Our life is meant to be lived Divinely. Please don't sell yourself short.

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INNER VIEWS

No one pours new wine into old wine skins. Should one do so, the new wine will burst the old skins, the new wine will spill out, and the skins will be lost. New wine should be poured into fresh skins. (Luke 15:38-39)

After ninety years of observations Bro. Henry C.Ss.R. quipped, "There are lots of changes but few improvements." Real improvements need both new wine and new skins, new awareness and a new conceptual framework to hold and develop a larger horizon for those experiences.

Sometimes it's nice to do something "For a change." But change is not the same thing as maturing spiritually. When we try to change ourselves we can only imagine ourselves in terms of what we already know - old skins. True maturity is a new way of being ourselves (new wine) and a new way of perceiving our reality (new skins) because of our new way of being ourselves.

The problem with trying to change ourselves is that we always imagine our changed life so that it can fit the smallness of our ego. This is what Jesus means when he talks about "old wine skins." Trinity continually brews and ferments us to help our awareness expand to the wholeness necessary to receive more and more of Trinity. Our ego (old wine skins) can only repeat old way of reacting. And even worse our ego looks to change externals rather than accept new wine (the new and enlarged capacity that Trinity is creating within us.)

In one of the most practical Gospel passages that I know of Jesus gives us criteria for knowing if we are following wise guides in our efforts to become more truly his followers:

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

Can a blind person act as a guide to another blind person? Will they not both fall into the ditch? ...Why concentrate on the speck in your neighbor's eye when you miss the plank in your own?" (Luke 6:39)

We know we are following blind guides when we catch ourselves judging our sisters and brothers. When our attention is focused on the speck in their eye and avoids the plank in our own, we are blind and our guide is blind. Our guide can be beliefs we are attached to (a blind point of view) or religious or political commentators, authors and leaders. When the finger of blame is consistently pointing outside of our self we are avoiding our own blindness and distancing our self from that inner place where Trinity is fermenting new wine within us.

Blindness, blame, rigidity and a literal point of view are usually close companions. Even with the best of intentions our ego can only repeat its point of view. We need the gracious and intoxicating gift of God's new wine to help us let go of old skins so that we can be transformed into new wine. It's no coincidence that in John's Gospel the first of Jesus' signs revealing the Kingdom of God bursting forth into our world is changing water into wine at Cana (John 2). Notice in this Gospel passage that even Jesus had to be nudged (guided) by his Mother's awareness of God responding to the needs of the bride and groom.

If we pay attention to our interpretation and understanding of scripture over the span of our lives we can see this new wine being poured into our lives over and over again. I have homily notes from a homily I gave in 1998 on this passage about blind guides in Luke. At that time I was struggling with trying to please God rather than receiving the gift of seeing with Trinity's compassion and generosity.

Now I am more aware of my struggle to see with Trinity's compassion and generosity. But I'm getting a hint that Trinity is teaching me to let go of the struggle. I get the idea. It's about actually trusting Trinity rather than believing a new idea. Now I'm waiting for this Gospel to change my struggling, to ferment the new wine of trust within me. Reading the Gospel passage helps create new wine skins and moments of prayerful presence give me time to let Trinity ferment the new wine of trust.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS

Jesus and the Ten Lepers - Luke 11:1719

There are 30,000 people living within a miles of St. Michael's church tower. The combined total of our Sunday masses would total 1% of that population. This might give you a sense of what the one leper felt like in today's gospel. And here you are because you too have responded to Jesus. That makes you part of today's Gospel.

You are part of the Gospel because, like the leper, you have responded in faith. Faith is the willingness to trust yourself to God, to let God grow you, nurture your spirit, make you the loved and loving person you are meant to be.

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

This doesn't make you "better" than anyone else. Notice that all ten lepers were healed but as the Gospel tells us *"As they were going... one of them realizing he had been healed, returned glorifying God."* All ten were healed, but only one "realized," only one woke up to the reality that she is whole. That's what faith does. Faith makes us alert to the reality that many miss.

All ten lepers got what they desperately wanted. God is generous that way. But only one woke up to the reality of her connection to Jesus and the Father. Only one became aware of the reality of her relationship to the Father that Jesus revealed as the saving revelation. That's faith, that's what heals and saves us.

When the leper returns to thank Jesus the leper's gratitude becomes an opportunity for Jesus to continue the gift, to ripen it. Jesus helps the leper become aware of what is truly life giving. The other nine continued on their way. They were focused on externals, on completing their task, doing their duty. But the faith of the one leper returns to be awakened to the meaning of faith - faith is about a relationship, a way of being in our life that is enlivened by our connection to God. This relationship profoundly effects our way of perceiving our life.

Charles Shultz, the creator of Peanuts puts it this way: "Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia." This can shift our whole way of thinking. Why worry about today, its already over and done with. If this helps us let go of our worries we will enjoy today much more. Faith is a letting go so that we are more fully alive to the sacredness and Divine Presence of this moment. Faith is an emptying out of our ideas and hopes to receive from God's unconditional love.

Let's try this shift again. Think back to the year 2000 when we changed centuries. Remember the celebrations and all the predictions? We worried about Y2K. And we hoped that a new century would bring vast improvements.

Do you remember who won the Miss America pageant in the year 2000? I bet she was beautiful and popular. How about the Heisman trophy? He must have been a great athlete. Do you know who won the Noble Peace Prize that year? It certainly had a great deal of honor and prestige attached to it. So who won it? Even more important, who were the Best Actress and Best Actor at the Academy Awards? These people are the best in their field. They're internationally and publicly recognized.

Here's another quiz that like faith may shift your focus of meaning. Can you remember a couple of teachers who helped you in school? How about friends who have been with you through difficult times? Or people who have taught you something worthwhile? Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated.

This second list is the kind of relationship that happened between the one leper whose faith came alive, who awakened to a relationship with Jesus and the Father. This is far different than coming to Jesus or the Father just to get something done. That's where the faith of the other nine lepers left them. "Where are the other nine?" is Jesus' way of helping the one leper appreciate and be grateful for the gift she had received.

ARCHIVES SCRIPTURES

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