

REFLECTIONS FOR THE 14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 03 July 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

“One who reads the words of prayer with great devotion may come to see the lights within the letters.” These words from the Jewish Hasidic teachings on contemplative prayer come to life in our readings from the Liturgy of the Word this day. Each of our four readings has within it lights and symbols and sounds that resonate not only in our minds but, even more, in our spirits.



The first reading from Isaiah 66 was written in the time of the return from the Babylonian exile, a time when the Jewish community was finding itself once again in the land. But now they were in a land that they no longer owned, they were experiencing new relationships with foreigners since many of them were now married to people who were not Jewish, they had a new form of relationship with their God now that the temple had been destroyed, and they had a new appreciation for the importance of the written word – their scriptures – in shaping their faith tradition. Today’s reading speaks to their

confidence in the God who rescued them from exile. Their confidence is expressed in three ways: a call to joy, Jerusalem personified as a mother, and God comforting the children of Jerusalem.

The call to joy comes in acknowledging the sadness and grief of their past lives yet knowing that they have returned home to Jerusalem and the surrounding region. The expression of their joy is presented in a symbolic way, “that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom” (Is 66:11). Jerusalem is presented as a mother with her newborn child, comforting her child and giving her child nourishing milk. It is important to note the dignity of woman embedded here in the recognition of God’s presence to the people of Judah in comforting and in caring for them.

But, in the next verse, the symbol is deepened further. Now God is presented as a mother, “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Is 66:13). This is not the first time in the Old Testament that God’s is imagined as a mother. We read in Numbers, “Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, ‘carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child, to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?’” (Num 11:12), and in Deuteronomy, “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deut 32:18). There are several references to God as mother in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 42:14, God cries out like a woman in labor, “I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant.” In Isaiah 49:15, God is depicted as more attentive and compassionate than a nursing mother, “Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” Meister Eckhart, the 13th century theologian and mystic, says, “What does God do all day long? God gives birth. From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth.” Eckhart goes further and says, “We are all meant to be mothers of God, for God is always needing to be born.”



Psalm 66 begins with words so well known to us, “Make a joyful noise to God, all Earth” (Ps 66:1). Yet we rarely take the time to ponder in our hearts the depth of these words. Think of the many



ways that all Earth makes a joyful noise to God: a little baby laughing, a gull crying, a waterfall splashing its waters against the rocks, the whisper of wind through the trees, a mewling kitten, a crackling fire, the saying of the Rosary, a roll of thunder, the music of Beethoven, the roll of the ocean waves, a babbling brook, rain falling softly on the window, the chirping of a little chicken, the signing of this psalm. . . Think of the ways in which you personally make a joyful noise to

God – in your morning prayer, in your laughter with friends, in your words of comfort to someone who is suffering, in your sharing of a funny story, in your simple greeting to a staff person, in your heartfelt words of thanks to someone, in your plea for justice for Earth. This week, take moments every day to hear the joyful noise of Earth, giving praise and thanks to God in sound. Take moments every day to make a joyful noise yourself giving praise and thanks to God.

The resonating sounds of the readings continue in the short reading from Paul’s letter to the Galatians with its two beautiful words of blessing, “As for those who will follow this rule –peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) and “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters” (Gal 6: 18). As the reading says, such peace and mercy will bring about “a new creation” (Gal 6:15). Remember that the Galatians would have heard these words spoken aloud, not in written form, yet another way of “making a joyful noise”!

In the Gospel passage today (unique among the four Gospels), the writer describes Jesus’ appointing “seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go” (Lk 10:1). We read almost the same sending forth in Lk 9:1-6 when Jesus appoints the Twelve: they are to go out to “every town and place,” they are not to take any supports with them (no purse, no sandals), and they are to drive out demons, cure the sick, teach about the coming of the kin-dom of God, and bring “peace” (Lk 10:5-6). They are not to stay where they are not welcomed, not to force themselves on people who choose not to listen. Why “seventy”? Seventy is a symbol for all humankind, all the peoples of Earth – in Genesis 10, we are told that there are seventy “nations” descended from Noah’s three sons after the flood had destroyed all the peoples of the Earth.



We know the Twelve by name, all men. We also know from Luke 8 that women were among Jesus’ followers, “The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources” (Lk 8:1-3). It is likely then that the “seventy others” included women. In the four Gospel accounts, we usually meet women disciples in groups (supporting Jesus and his disciples, standing at the foot of the cross, watching at the tomb, appearing after the resurrection), and, in the Acts and letters of Paul, we often find the women disciples within pairs or small teams. In the Acts of the Apostles which was written by the same writer as was Luke’s Gospel, we meet Priscilla and Aquilla mentioned three times (Acts 18:2–3, 18, 26) and three other times in Paul’s letters (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:2–5; 2 Tm 4:19). Paul’s letters also speak about Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7), Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3), Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis (Rom 16:12), and Nereus and his sister (Rom 16:15). That the “seventy others” go out “in pairs” strongly suggests the inclusion of women disciples in their midst.

Wherever the seventy disciples went, it was as if Jesus himself was with them. He trusted them to bring peace, to teach, and to heal. He warned them that following him would not always be any easy road – sometimes they would be warmly welcomed and other times they would be ignored or treated disrespectfully. They would know their reward only when their “names are written in heaven” (Lk 10:20). You know from your own experience of being a “missionary disciple” (as Pope Francis calls us in his *Joy of the Gospel*) that what Jesus said to the seventy has been true for you. And so, I ask you today (not after you have died), “How is your name written now in heaven?” Why is heaven rejoicing in who you are and what you have done?

The spiritual writer, Jan Richardson, in her [“Blessing in the Dust”](#), describes the rewards of being among those “seventy others”:

You thought the blessing would come in the staying;
in casting your lot with this place, these people;
in learning the art of remaining, of abiding.
And now you stand on the threshold again.
The home you had hoped for, had ached for,
is behind you – not yours, after all.
The clarity comes as small comfort, perhaps,
but it comes: illumination enough for the next step.
As you go, may you feel the full weight of your gifts
gathered up in your two hands,
the complete measure of their grace
in your heart that knows there is a place for them,
for the treasure that you bear.
I promise you there is a blessing in the leaving,
in the dust shed from your shoes
as you walk toward home –
not the one you left but the one that waits ahead,
the one that already reaches out for you
in welcome, in gladness for the gifts that none but you could bring.

Rejoice today that your names are written in heaven, rejoice for the gifts that none but you could bring!

