

**REFLECTIONS FOR THE 20<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 14 August 2022**  
**The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale**

Each one of us has a favourite book or passage from Scripture – passages which, when we hear them, cause our hearts to fill with joy or our spirits to be touched with healing. Today’s readings contain three such passages for me.

In the letter to the Hebrews, we read, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). In the words of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, we hear, “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lk 12:49). And in Psalm 40, the psalmist rejoices, “I waited patiently for the Lord who inclined to me and heard my cry” (Ps 40:1).

***“We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses”***



**All Saints Day 1 Wassily Kandinsky**

This image of the holy ones in our lives who influence us to run with perseverance the race before us calls forth deep gratitude from us. Think first of the cloud of witnesses who have died before you – parents, siblings, relatives, friends, people whom you never knew personally but have influenced your very being, the founder of your religious community or its members who have passed on the charism to you – all the holy ones who have given you the wisdom and the courage to do the good you need to do. Think of the cloud of witnesses who share your journey with you today – family members, friends, colleagues, people whom you do not know personally but whose lives have given you strength to go on.

Think of the cloud of witnesses who are other-than-human on Earth or in the universe – the rain or sun or snow or stars or grasses or flowers or trees or fish or puppies or kittens or music or paintings or poetry or mountains or hills or sunsets or morning mist – all of God’s created beings that show you the wonder of love and joy in your life. How blessed we are with this communion of holy ones, living among us now or gone before us into eternal life!

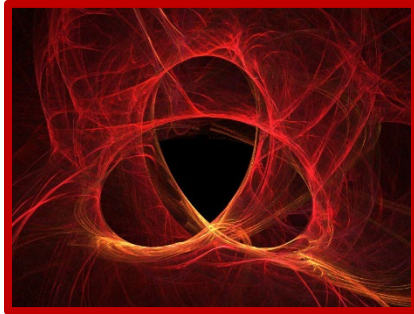
Take time this week to see with the eyes of your heart images of this cloud of witnesses from your childhood, your youth, your early adult years, and your present years. Prepare to be surprised at who or what your eyes see in the cloud of witness. As the writer of Hebrews says in a later verse, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13



**Angels Unawares, Timothy Schmalz**

***“I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled”*** – in what race that is set before us is this cloud of witnesses encouraging us to follow with perseverance? Jesus’ words in Luke’s Gospel remind us that following the good news is not always easy or simple. Indeed, it is often countercultural, inviting us to challenge the norms of today’s society, calling us

not only to do good for those who are suffering or are in need but to find ways to end the very causes of suffering in our world – whether suffering of persons or Earth creatures or Earth herself. Pope Francis tells us, “The fire of love, lit by Christ in the world through the Holy Spirit, is a boundless fire. It is a universal fire. This was so ever since the early days of Christianity: bearing witness to the Gospel spread like a beneficial fire, overcoming all division among individuals, social categories, peoples and nations. Bearing witness to the Gospel does burn. It overcomes all forms of particularism and keeps charity wide open to all, with a preferential option for the poorest and the excluded.”



Catherine McAuley used the powerful image of women as the fire Christ cast on the earth. She took Jesus’ words and stated desire, and she brought them into her time when Jesus’ will was being done, the fire was kindling, indeed very fast. She wrote about five young women who were joining her community, “This is some of the fire He cast on the earth – kindling.” In another letter referring to the same five women, she adds, “It is very animating to see five persons most happily circumstanced,

leave their family and country, to enter on a mission contrary to our natural inclinations, but the fire that Christ cast upon the [earth] is kindling very fast.”

While we often speak about Jesus as the Bringer of Peace, this passage reminds us that Jesus is also a Disturber of the Peace! We should not be surprised. When Joseph and Mary brought the infant Jesus to the temple for circumcision, Simeon prophesied that “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed” (Lk 2:34). Jesus was rejected by his hometown of Nazareth – “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence at him” (Mk 6:3). When Jesus preached in the synagogue, the people were angered, “When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff” (Lk 4:28-29).

As Jesus and his disciples were going from Galilee to Jerusalem, they were not allowed to enter the village in Samaria, “On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to prepare for his arrival, but they did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem” (Lk 9:52-53). Many of his disciples reacted negatively when they heard Jesus’ teaching, “Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him” (Jn 6:66). In his early preaching, Peter says, quoting Psalm 118:22, “This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone’” (Acts 4:11). Paul says that “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23).



For what is your heart on fire and kindling? Does your heart burn for justice for homeless people or for children who are abused or for Earth which is being destroyed by our greed? Does your heart cry out for inclusion for people who have severe mental illness or are deemed to be “different” or who do not act in the way we think best? Does your heart reach out in compassion to those who are lonely or feel abandoned or are experiencing signs of cognitive impairment? Does your heart ache for animals and trees destroyed by wildfire or water polluted by waste or air made toxic by poisonous chemicals? For what is your heart on fire and kindling?



***“I waited patiently for the Lord who inclined to me and heard my cry”*** – the psalmist speaks for all of us in this statement of trust. I love the original Hebrew translation of “the Lord who inclined to me” – it is “the Lord who stretched out to me.” The Lord does not simply answer my cry – the Lord stretches out a hand to me, eagerly responding when I give the slightest indication that I need help! So many psalms echo this same level of trust – “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Ps 23:1); “You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy” (Ps

16:11); “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps 27:1); “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken” (Ps 62:5-6); and “You have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me” (Ps 63:7-8).

Think of the wording of the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-10: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kin-dom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” For those who reach with openness and trust, God responds with abundant blessing.

Take time this week to reflect on times you waited patiently for God and God answered in ways that you never expected. Think of times when you had reason to despair but trusted that you were held safely in the shadow of God’s wings. Listen to the new song which God is putting in your mouth, “The Lord put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God” (Ps 40:3).

We conclude our reflections today with a conversation between Catherine of Siena and a modern spiritual writer.

Catherine:

*Be who God meant you to be,  
and you will set the world on fire.*

Response in prayer:

*Sister, saint, dear heavenly friend,  
Teach me how to believe like you did.  
Show me how to be brave like you were.  
Be the spark that helps me start  
a wildfire of God’s love,  
like you said we all can.*



**Statue of St Catherine of Siena  
Gardens of Castel Sant’ Angelo  
Rome**