

January Reflection

This is the time of the year when we concentrate on the new...it is a New Year, with new resolutions, invitations to continue growing, new insights about the year now past and how well I lived it. We often ask ourselves these familiar questions: what major events, what decisions, what people have shaped the direction of my life?

We may ask ourselves: What changes do I want to make in this New Year to bring about transformation, newness, wholeness? Hopefully we hear the quiet voice of God saying to us: ***Behold, I make all things new.***

Maybe, in this time of grace and favor, we are to “behold,” to simply pause, to see with new eyes, hear with ears attuned to the Gospel. Can we, like Mary, hold all these things, reflecting on them in our heart? Are we able to recognize that there is “Some One” who sees the goodness that is in me and challenges me to do something new or something that I never dreamt of before? God does these “never dreamt of moments” as we see in Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth, Zechariah, the shepherds, the wise men; the list can go on and on.

Don't we often get on the treadmill of life and just aimlessly keep on going, not taking the time to pause, even to see who is accompanying me; who desires that I continue to become the person who is the very image of God. Sometimes we write the script of what our life is to be and are afraid to think differently even though our life changes. What is the script that I am holding onto too tightly while not allowing God and Grace to move me toward new paths, a new script, uncharted territories?

There is a story told of “a little boy in India, who, in the Christmas pageant, got to play the innkeeper at the door. When Joseph and Mary knock on the inn's door, the little boy says, “No, I have no room for you.” They knock a second time, and the boy repeated the same line to them, “No I have no room for you!” The third time that Joseph and Mary knocked, the boy forgot his line. He stared at them for a long, silent moment. Someone back stage loudly whispered, “Tell them “No” again. But since that was not the right line in his mind, the boy took a deep breath and said, “Well, just come on in and we'll make room for you.” The crowd in the church laughed” and wondered if maybe the little boy learned this hospitality from his mother or grandmother.

“I imagined this was just a little boy who forgot the script and looked into his heart for the answer. He just thought, ‘What would be the right thing to do?’” (*from Celebration Publications: Your Christmas Reflection*) The little boy's missive was an awesome call to us to create a new script, to look into our hearts and discover a different way of the heart, a Gospel heart, a heart shaped in the love of Jesus.

But we don't easily arrive at this heart sense without taking time to reconnect with the heartbeat of our lives: Jesus. We are not always attuned to that voice that says, ***“Behold I make all things new:” or to even hear this: “You are my beloved in whom my grace abides.”***

The beauty of this story is that what was happening at the beginning of the story was about the little boy as innkeeper but what happened when off-script was about the love, and compassion toward the other...from a little heart attuned to God's love and compassion.

Prayer leads us into the heart of God so that as we are sent, we become the heart and the very image of God to our world. Could a practice of our prayer be to go off-script once in

awhile? Can I ask myself: Do I love the Gospel? How passionate am I about the treasure of the Gospel? Its wonder; its awe, its challenge. Where was God's grace visible in my life today? How will these graced moments influence the way I live today and tomorrow?

Pope Francis, in his message "The Joy of the Gospel" "gives us a blueprint of hope. His emphasis is at the heart of his core message and the mission of the Church: it is a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ. **Our personal encounter with God must reclaim that intimacy in order to represent the divine face of mercy that is turned toward the world.** He tells us that we are most alive when we go to those growing edges that invite us to look into our hearts when we have forgotten the script and say, "Ah, just come in and I will find room for you." This type of response is to grow in Christ, to accept our missionary identity and to make our lives models of the Joy of the Gospel." *(from Celebration Publications: The Joy of the Gospel)*

To make our life of prayer more real for us it would be essential to look at those who surround us every single day...Who is the refugee that I keep far removed from me, who hungers for a bit of attention, who feels excluded? Who is this refugee that I can welcome? What is calling forth in me a deeper response to my life with God?

These are the calls to our life of prayer; these are the invitations to welcome in; these are today's Mary and Joseph knocking at our door. Hopefully, we will grace and be graced by someone with a compassionate heart like the small Innkeeper who says, "Well, just come in and we will make room for you!"

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