

Scripture for September 21, 2008

Reflection from John Surette, SJ

“Your ways are not my ways”

In our first reading from the prophet Isaiah we have some words that he places on the lips of God: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.” (Isaiah 55:8)

After the attacks upon the United States on September 11, 2001, a special fund was set-up to assist the families of all those who were killed. Now some are suggesting that a similar fund be established to aid the victims of the hurricanes of 2008.

If this fund becomes a reality it will be interesting to see how the money will be allocated. Many will say that those

who lost the most should be reimbursed the most. According to this view, the rich and middle class people who have lost the more expensive homes and businesses will receive the larger sums of money while the poor who have lost their wooden shacks and their house trailers will receive smaller amounts. According to this view, those who are best able to bounce back

from the catastrophe – the upper and middle classes - will receive more money than those who are least able to recover, namely, those who live below the official poverty line.

Many in our country will look upon this arrangement I have just described

The Well

A Center for our

Sacred Unity with God,

Earth, and One

Another.

1515 W. Ogden Ave.

LaGrange Park, IL 60526

www.csjthewell.org

thewell@csjlagrange.org



and consider it to be fair and just. Fair and just? Can a truly deep Christian view of things consider that way of allocating the money to be fair and just? Are not the poor, those least able to recover, the ones who have the greater need...are not these the people who should receive the greater amount of money? Should not a society that claims to be built upon Judeo/Christian values have a special responsibility and preference for the down-pressed and the marginalized of society?

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”

A similar scenario plays itself out in today’s gospel reading (Matthew 20:1-16). A landowner goes out at dawn and hires the best workers: those who are highly motivated and highly skilled, and those who have the means to get to the vineyard at an early hour. He goes out again at nine and at noon and at three in the afternoon to hire more workers. Perhaps these workers were not so physically strong or not so skilled or perhaps their family situations and responsibilities kept them from getting to the vineyard at an earlier hour.

We know how story ends. The landowner pays all the workers the same wage and those who worked the whole day complain that this arrangement is not fair and just... fair and just, that is, for them.

The landowner, however, sees things differently. In his eyes all of the workers are in need of employment to support their families and so he pays them all the same amount. In his eyes, this arrangement is the arrangement that is fair and just for all the workers.

Yes, “Your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”

Another similar scenario is also being played out on our Planet Earth in this 21st century with its ever increasing ecological diminishment and destruction. In our legal system it is only humans who have rights. We do not recognize river rights or tree rights or penguin rights in the Antarctic or polar bear rights in the Arctic. Even to speak this way sounds strange to our ears. And so we use, diminish, and even destroy the rivers, the trees, the penguins and the polar bears in the mistaken idea that they have no rights and that their existence is only for the sake of our human existence.

In human society in general and in our American society in worldview in which we humans live at the top of the pyramid with the rivers, trees, penguins, polar bears, and everything else down below us. Being at the top we view ourselves as having a spiritual dimension while everything down below has no spiritual dimension, no dignity, no truth, no voice...no rights.

The Creator does not see it this way. In the Creator's eyes everything that participates in the great Mystery of Existence including all the other-than-human creatures have a right to exist, a right to their habitat or place, and a right to continue into the future. In the Creator's eyes everything that participates in the great Mystery of Existence embodies a spiritual dimension, possesses dignity, contains truth, and has a voice.

Yes, "Your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor are your ways my ways."

The truth, sisters and brothers, is that within the Reign of God that Jesus spent his life proclaiming there is no overall hierarchical structuring. All are in need of God's love and all receive it...the rivers, the trees, the penguins in the Antarctic, the polar bears in the Arctic and we humans as well. It is an all-inclusive Divine Love!

The Well

*A Center for our
Sacred Unity with
God,
Earth, and One
Another.*

1515 W. Ogden Ave.
LaGrange Park, IL 60526
www.csjthewell.org
thewell@csjlagrange.org