

Preaching for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 25, 2010

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(As I begin my preaching, I have a confession to make that the sisters will understand. I see our Direction Statement now in everything I read, so you will find it echoing in my words this morning. I hope our guests will be able to follow what I share! **Tambien, pido disculpas a mis hermanas porque no tuve oportunidad para traducir mis palabras.**)

Like the nautilus and the Mayan ritual we just experienced, we are drawn into a deep center of love that impels us outward to spread the light. Grounded in our loving God, we find the courage to ask for what we need as we look with eyes of faith at the reality of our present world. The light that moves inward must move back out. Abraham and Jesus both have something to say to us about having this posture.

What a relationship Abraham had with the LORD! Don't you envy him! God is standing before him and Abraham moves **nearer** to plead for the blameless. Talk about bold action! The way the story is told he plays with God's merciful nature, bargaining down the number needed for sparing the city. Sly fellow! However, underneath his cajoling, lies evidence of a profound love between Abraham and his God. He knows the God with whom he is dealing quite intimately, and acts out of a **certitude** that this God cannot resist the cry of the guiltless! Notice we are not told the end of the story—the city is destroyed, but not the innocent—they escape. Because Abraham lived out of a deep center of love, he was able to intercede for those who needed his audacity. Rooted in the real and in a contemplative stance, he was impelled to speak on behalf of others and they are blessed as a result.

Jesus encourages the same kind of confidence and action in his followers. The prayer he teaches them begins with praise of and reliance on a God who loves us as a father and mother and provides us with all our necessities. We can be certain that our gracious God will care for our daily needs. What follows in the prayer is an admission of our sinfulness; we ask for forgiveness out of a forgiving heart. It speaks of an invitation to live out of a spirituality of reconciliation and peace, always seeking to see in the other the presence of God, or to bring that presence in the most difficult of situations, when we or others have been hurt by what someone has done. This is when we prove that the light within is strong and true, able to go beyond what society or our natural inclinations might be. In a sense it is not God that puts us to the test, but rather our understanding of God's ability to transform us. Can I trust that God's love can fill my heart, and I do not have to hold on to the grudge or hurt? It takes faith and courage to be forgiving, to trust that this does not diminish me, but rather completes me, makes me more of who I am called to be, a person of peace.

The story that Jesus relates to explain his prayer makes it clear how true this is. There are two friends, apparently good ones. If I were the friend asleep in my house, I don't know about you, but I wouldn't want a "friend" like the one he describes, who thinks she/he can wake me up in the middle of the night for some loaves of bread! But, remarkably, Jesus is saying that God doesn't mind!

Ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

He doesn't say perhaps, or quite likely. His wording speaks of cause and effect. God cannot resist our prayer! We must have the boldness, the **audacity**, the self-assurance of that pesky friend that we matter enough to God and that our needs are irresistible to God! We are called to the same kind of intimate relationship with God as Abraham enjoyed. Through our baptism

we were buried with Christ and brought to life with him into a new way of being, an invitation to share in the love of the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

The light that moves inward must also move outward. This love is not meant to be kept within as a secret. Trinitarian love **must** be shared, **must** express itself in love of others. Let's take another look at the friends in the Gospel. What if we are the one asleep at home, and the friend is the needs of others knocking on our door? Do we respond with the generosity of which Jesus speaks? I fear I am more particular than what he describes. For some people in my life there is a direct correlation between their asking and receiving, seeking and finding a response from me, their knocking on the door of my heart and my opening to them. However, I must confess this is not a universal. Conversion is required for me to be this generous with my love, time, and talents. What of ourselves as a congregation? How has our General Chapter been transformative for us in this regard? Hopefully each of us and all of us collectively are different because of our experience. What bold actions will be expressions of this reality? How will the voices that challenge us find in us the hope they seek?

A third interpretation is that the "friend" with the unexpected guests is each of us! The needs of others may break into my consciousness at unforeseen times, requiring immediate attention. How will we advocate for others? Where or how far will we go to provide for their needs? What will the love of God and the cries of the poor impel us to do to change the hearts of **others** so that the injustice they experience can be righted? We are women of the Word, uniquely individual, who choose to walk together reaching out to spread the light. We know there is an urgency to change things in our world before it is too late...to heal Mother Earth, to welcome the young, the stranger, to reconcile differences between peoples before we destroy one another. This "friend" won't go away from **our** door, so how do we knock at the door of the rich, the powerful, the complacent to awaken them? Sisters and guests, this Gospel challenges us to be the voice of those who cannot speak of their own needs or are ignored. If not us, who?

What does this message say about our future? How do we hold and share the light we have been given? We have been assembled in the General Chapter to be converted and renewed by the Spirit and one another. Only each of us can say if that is happened. We do not know what the future will bring; however, we do know that we are committed to walking into it together, living out of a deep center of love in a world of sacred diversity that calls forth from us a missionary spirit in response to the voices that challenge.

In the presence of our guests, we proclaim a prophetic way of being Church out of the vision of Mother Pia. This is who we are and who God calls us to be for the sake of the kin-dom. The words of Sister Mary Thomas Lillis written to the Congregation in 1984 when she was Congregational Prioress, ring in my ears and resonate in my heart. I invite you to open your hands and look at them as I share this quote.

And the future? If the charism, the vision is not in us, not visible in us, the Congregation will surely perish—and deserve to. If it lives on in us, the Congregation will be alive, vital, fully at the service of the Gospel. It is in our hands, yours and mine.

Abraham lived with hands and heart open to God. Jesus teaches us maintain this stance in prayer and in response to others. May our hands remain open as we embrace our reality and live for God and for God's people in our age. The time is NOW, Sisters and friends! It calls for bold action!

The LOVE of God impels us to preach the WORD!