



Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

February 4, 2018

Readings

This week:

Job 7:1–4, 6–7

1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–23

Mark 1:29–39

Next week:

Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

Mark 1:40–45

Psalm

Praise the Lord, who heals the broken-hearted. (*Psalms 147*)

Today's presider is Msgr. John Sandersfeld.

Today

The Thomas Merton Center community worships and celebrates Sunday liturgy each week at the regularly scheduled 8:45 am parish Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Waverley and Homer Streets, Palo Alto. Members of the Thomas Merton community participate in planning these liturgies in the spirit of Vatican II and its call to “full, active and conscious participation” in Catholic liturgical life.

The Thomas Merton Center is supported by your donations. If you choose to donate, there are return envelopes in the bulletin on the last Sunday of each month for your convenience (donations by check or cash are welcome). The donation basket is in the back of church after Mass or available by the coffeepot after Mass—or you can use the envelope to mail your donation. **Please do not put your TMC envelope in the collection baskets passed during Mass (these are for parish contributions only).**

Calendar

Thursday, February 8, 7:00 pm

TMC Board, Thomas House Dining Room

From Thomas Merton

I need not add that I think we have now reached a stage of (long-overdue) religious maturity at which it may be possible for someone to remain perfectly faithful to a Christian and Western monastic commitment, and yet to learn in depth from, say, a Buddhist or Hindu discipline and experience. I believe that some of us need to do this in order to improve the quality of our own monastic life and even to help in the task of monastic renewal which has been undertaken within the Western Church...

The question of “communication” is now no longer fraught with too great difficulties. The publication of classical Asian texts and of studies on them, especially in English and German, has led to the formation of what one might call an intertraditional vocabulary. We are well on our way to a workable interreligious lexicon of key words--mostly rooted in Sanskrit--which will permit intelligent discussion of all kinds of religious experience in all the religious traditions. This is in fact already being done to some extent, and one of the results of it is that psychologists and psychoanalysts, as well as anthropologists and students of comparative religion, are now able to talk a kind of lingua franca of religious experience.

--*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (1973)

The Thomas Merton Center for Catholic Spiritual Development, P.O. Box 60061, Palo Alto, California 94306, was founded by a group of Roman Catholic lay persons in 1995, and incorporated in 1996, to offer Catholic liturgy, to augment, support and lead the development of ecumenical spirituality, and to foster new ways for Catholics and other Christians to develop a deeper spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ and, through him, with God. From its Catholic roots, it seeks to join with members of other faiths, Christian and non-Christian, to support religious education and spiritual development.

COMMUNITY NOTES

News Announcements Requests

Sacristan help needed at 7:15 am daily Mass:

A regular sacristan helper at the 7:15 daily Mass here at STA is temporarily unavailable due to a family illness. Others are filling in, but more hands would be so welcome. If you would be interested in serving in this vital ministry in the early morning once or twice a week, please contact Mary Louise Hanley at (650) 248-8287, hanleytm@sbcglobal.net. Training is provided, gratitude abounds!

TMC Board meets February 8:

The Board of Directors of the Merton Center will have its regular monthly meeting, Thursday, February 8, at 7:30 in the Thomas House. On the agenda are the following items:

- Review November Board Minutes
- Review January Board Minutes
- Annual Membership letter
- TMC future structure
- Muslim community
- 2019 International Merton Society Conference
- January Thomas Merton Retreat
- New TMC lapel microphone
- Sierra Roots
- Local Volunteer Opportunities, Casa Clara, etc.

All TMC members are welcome to attend.

Lector and Eucharistic Minister schedule:

John Arnold has completed the scheduling of 8:45 am Mass lectors and Eucharistic ministers covering February 18 till July 1. He has emailed the list to all currently active in those positions. Please acknowledge receipt directly to John at jsaoso@comcast.net.

Bring your 2017 blessed palms to Mass Feb. 4 and 11, so they may be turned into ashes for Ash Wednesday, Feb. 14. A basket receptacle will be in the vestibule.

PRAY FOR US: Please remember in your prayers this week Denise Alongi, George Bouchey, Tom Carmody, George Chippendale, Mary Connors, Mike Cummings, Wayne Cummings, Ken Dias, Pat Dietrich, Fr. Thierry Geris, Deonna Gill, Emily Gill, Joanne Hasegawa, Fr. John Hester, Dean Judd, Hunter Kubit, Dick Jackman, Edna Jamati, Alicia Kot, Fr. Bill Leininger, Andre and Alyssa Lippard, Deacon Ysidro and Dolores Madrigal, Mary Rose McGuire, Maureen Mooney, Hayden Pastorini, Paul Prochaska, Anne Rush, Priya Smith, Bernice Sullivan, Jean Vistica, Dolores Walsh, Kay Williams, and T. J. Wooten. [Add or subtract names by e-mailing Bulletin editors: Michelle Hogan, Kay Williams. See listings on page 4.]

CA People of Faith meeting February 17:

There will be a meeting of California People of Faith on February 17th in the Thomas House from 2 to 4 pm and open to all interested persons.

Under discussion will be:

- * Status of the death penalty in California
- * How you can assist the abolition campaign
- * The way forward to ending the death penalty in California.

Questions: Terry McCaffrey:

terrymc0531@gmail.com, 408-515-0341

STA lecture February 6 on Dorothy Day:

Learn about Dorothy Day, a convert, social activist and possibly a Saint, with Larry Purcell of the Redwood City Catholic Worker House on Tuesday, Feb. 6, 7 - 8:30 pm, at St. Albert the Great Hospitality Center, 1095 Channing Ave., in Palo Alto.

Who was Dorothy Day? Why did she feel “hounded by God? Where did her fascination with the Catholic Church lead her?

Larry will discuss the journey of Dorothy Day to find a way to combine the gospels and her life with the poor, as well as her resistance to the system of life around her. Larry has been a Catholic Worker for the past 40+ years. His core work includes a home for troubled teens, an English language school, a large food program, and housing for 25 people a night, in addition to feeding, clothing, housing and educating the poor.

Sunday, Feb. 11: Multifaith Prayers for Peace:

Sunday, February 11, 7-7:30 pm, First Lutheran Church, 600 Homer Ave., Palo Alto:

In the midst of difficult times, Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice will host “Peaceful Presence,” a monthly prayer service on the evening of the 11th of each month, offering a time of quiet multi-faith prayers for peace and strength for the journey. All are welcome: those of all faith traditions and of no defined faith, those who are suffering at the hands of their own government, those who need a pause in the midst of intensive work on behalf of others, and all who would like to pray with others for the well-being of all. The prayer time will include elements from several religious traditions.

Upcoming:

Sunday, March 11, 7-7:30 pm, Congregation Beth Am, 26790 Arastradero Rd., Los Altos Hills

COMMUNITY FORUM

Ideas Opinions Reflections Concerns

Is the Benedict Option based on Christian principles—or white middle-class ones?

[By Patrick Gilger, S.J., a graduate student at The New School for Social Research where he studies the sociology of religion and culture. The founding editor-in-chief of *The Jesuit Post*, he now serves as *America's* contributing editor for arts and culture.]

Again and again in his effort to defend the strategic withdrawal that characterizes the Benedict Option, Rod Dreher has emphasized one word: strategic. Yes, there is an element of withdrawal from the surrounding culture, he says, but this withdrawal is strategic. It is not a selfish flight from a sinking ship, he argues, but a withdrawal for re-engagement. Benedict Option communities are supposed to withdraw only so that they can be the kind of communities that produce Christian persons capable of evangelization.

But Dreher's recent comments about President Trump's use of the word "shithole" underline the suspicion that many have felt about this strategy: Is it really just strategic? Who gets included? Is its exclusive nature really based on Christian principles rather than, say, white middle-class principles? Although initially condemnatory of Trump's choice of words, Dreher confessed to second thoughts about his original negative reaction, saying that "the whole thing is more morally challenging than I initially thought." He attempted to explain this growing ambiguity by way of analogy with housing for the poor, writing:

If word got out that the government was planning to build a housing project for the poor in your neighborhood, how would you feel about it? Be honest with yourself. Nobody would consider this good news. You wouldn't consider it good news because you don't want the destructive culture of the poor imported into your neighborhood. Drive over to the poor part of town, and see what a shithole it is. Do you want the people who turned their neighborhood a shithole to bring the shithole to your street? No, you don't. Be honest, you don't.

Do I? Would I be able to consider this good news? Maybe not. But here is the thing: The extent to which I do not want housing for the poor in my own neighborhood is the extent to which I am failing to be a Christian. This must be admitted. It must be confessed.

We need to confess, confront and be converted from our own reluctance to share in the lives of the poor and to share our own life with them. The difficulty in doing so is one of the reasons why Jesuit formation builds in significant time living and working with people in poverty. That has taken a number of shapes in my own life. I spent years walking the infamous Cabrini-Green housing projects in Chicago. I lived and worked for three other years with the Lakota Sioux on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation—located in one of the poorest counties in our country. And just last summer I traveled with the Jesuit Refugee Service to the border between Sudan and South Su-

dan to live and work with the refugees of the incessant war there.

Each of these experiences was hard. I remember how afraid I used to feel that the rusted elevator doors in the Cabrini buildings would not open and I would be trapped there. I remember the boarded up houses and the wild packs of stray dogs and the bitter cold of the winter on Pine Ridge. And I remember the endless sea of gray United Nations tarps under which the thousands and thousands of South Sudanese refugees—the very refugees that President Trump included on his attempted travel ban one year ago—ate and slept and drank.

I remember how out of place I have felt in these places. I remember that it has taken me years to learn the meaning of the words "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours in the Kingdom of God" (Lk 6:20). And I remember that, though learning to recognize the beauty and grace of these communities has been a gift to me, it does not alleviate the cost and burden of poverty for those who live with them. It is instead a call to work for justice.

So it is not that the answer to Dreher's question is an easy one. It is not easy. But, for a Christian, it ought to be obvious. Is the arrival of the poor—whether as refugees or a new housing development—Good News? Yes it is. It is Good News because it is the arrival of Christ. The only question is whether we will be ready to go out to meet him when he comes.

The deeper problem is that this is exactly what the communities envisioned in the Benedict Option were supposed to be preparing us for: the welcoming of Christ. The purpose of strategic withdrawal was precisely for the building of communities in which deep Christian formation could succeed.

So this must be said: To the extent that Benedict Option communities do not form persons who are eager to welcome Christ in the poor—who can welcome Christ Poor—they are failing to be fully Christian communities. Not that they would be unique in this. We are all, Jesuits and BenOp-ers alike, more like the rich young man who goes away sad than like St. Francis of Assisi. ... But we must confess or at least desire to confess our refusal. We must know our failure to live up to the name we bear, a name that stands above all names.

Alongside its great insights, the great danger of the Benedict Option is that it can be used to excuse, rather than to confront, this exact pattern of sin. The danger is this: that in a community's concern for coherence, for finding solid ground in our liquid world, the magnanimity of Christ is cut down to the size of their own vision. When this happens a strategic withdrawal is made not from the world but from Christ—whose wisdom surpasses all understanding, and who praised the Father for revealing these things to the simple and not to the wise and learned.... #

How I came to speak Catholic:

[By Brian Doyle, who was the editor of *Portland Magazine* at the University of Portland and a longtime contributor to *U.S. Catholic*. He passed away in May 2017 at the age of 60 of brain cancer.]

Recently a friend asked me why I was Catholic. I mumbled the first few reasons that entered my head—the faith of my family, the enticing power of the story, and increasing belief as I age that divinity indeed infuses all things, and that Christ, dead in the dust at age 33, was indeed distilled divinity.

My friend was satisfied and moved the conversation along to other things, but I was not satisfied and so have continued to write down reasons that I am Catholic.

I believe that a carpenter's son named Jesus did indeed crack time in half, entered this world in the guise of a squalling infant, said his piece, was slaughtered for his pains, and cracked time again on his way home. I have no real basis for this belief, and neither do you. We either believe the man or we do not, and I do, for reasons I know and do not know.

Some of those reasons I can articulate. I was born into a Catholic family and learned early to love the smoke and poetry and incantation of the Roman rite. My friends were Catholic, and we were as bound by our common faith as we were by our exuberant youth, European forebears, and itchy masculinity.

Catholicism was the faith of my Gaelic forbears, whom I greatly respect in absentia. It was the faith of my grandmother, who shriveled and died before my eyes when I was 12 years old and whose funeral Mass taught me the enormous power of ritual—the skeleton that sustains us when we are weak. And the Catholicism was the faith of my alma mater, where I stuttered into manhood, and of three of my professional employers.

But I believe in Christ for muddier reasons. Sometimes I desperately need to lean on a God wiser and gentler than myself. Sometimes I desperately need to believe that when I die, I will not be sentenced to Fimbul, the Hell winter, where there is only the cold voice of Nothing, but rather I will be at peace and draped in Light. Sometimes I am nudged toward belief by the incredible persistence and eerie genius of the tale: the encompassing love of a Mother, the wordless strength of the Father, the Lord of All Worlds cast ashore on this one as a mewling child in dirty straw. Sometimes I am moved

Bulletin submissions must be e-mailed by Thursday noon or phoned by Thursday, 9:00 pm. Kay, kaywill@pacbell.net, (650)270-4188. Michelle, myhogan@comcast.net, (650) 493-8452.

past reason by the muscular poetry and subtle magic of these stories. Sometimes it is an intuitive yes as the light fails and the world is lit from below.

And sometimes I simply cast my lot with the sheer bravura of such a patently brazen lie. That a man could die and live again is ridiculous; even a child knows that death is the end.

Or is it?

I do not want to be sure about that. I want to meet my quiet father-in-law, a man I never knew, and thank him for the lovely miracle of his last daughter. I want to meet my brother, Jimmy, who died in his carriage on a bright April day in 1947. I want to meet William Blake, Dexter Gordon, Crazy Horse. I want to kiss my grandmother again on her leathery cheek. I would like to see my friend Dennis Green, age 23, who died on a humid highway in Florida while I was writing these words. I would like to meet this fellow Christ, who haunts the edges of my dreams, who flits from tree to tree in the forest through which I make my way. I would like to live forever and hold my wife and daughter and twin sons in my arms until the end of time and daily read the immense poem of Death Into Life and grin at the whirl and swirl of its endless unfolding, until the end of until.

So I am a Catholic for many reasons. Sometimes I think I might also be a Buddhist because that faith is calm and wide, and sometimes I think perhaps I am also a pantheist because I smell divinity in music, herons, drunkards, flowers. But Catholic is my language, Catholic is the coat I wear, Catholic is the house in which I live.

It is a house that needs cleaning, a house in which savagery and cowardice have thrived, where evil has a room with a view, where foolishness and greed have prominent places at the table. But it is also a house where hope lives, and hope is the greatest of mercies, the most enduring of gifts, the most nutritious of foods. Hope is what we drink from the odd story of the carpenter's odd son. When we eat his body in the ludicrous miracle of the Mass, we hope in him, and with him, forever and ever, world without end, amen, amen, amen.

[This article was originally published in the August 1996 issue of U.S. Catholic and reprinted in June 29, 2017.]

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