

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 21, 2018
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Reflection

In the second reading, Paul sets the Corinthians on a path of renunciation, "for the present form of this world is passing away." He asks them to detach from the flesh, from emotion, and from possessions: "let those who deal with the world [be] as though they had no dealings with it." What's the purpose of detachment? St. John of the Cross hopes for our divine union, allowing God to join our souls to him so that we can begin to know his being, his love and his mercy. God is infinite, so none of the created things can bring us to him in a definitive way. Appreciation for them is a useful introduction, suited for beginners. Beholding a piece of art can lead us to consider the potter, the painter, the sculptor, the musician. But love of things can also hold us back.

It does feel like "the present form of this world is passing away." Everything that was wrong is now right, and everything that was right is now wrong. Progress feels like one step forward and two steps back. It's like walking across a broken bridge, with each pace knocking off a piece, splashing and sinking in the river below. And being dazed by change is nothing new. Paul made his point 2000 years ago. Before him was a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus. He suggested that the river you step in today is not the same one as yesterday. It's a different river, since its water is ever new.

Jonah 3:1-5, 10
Ps 25
1 Cor 7:29-31
Mk 1:1-20

If the world is always changing, is there anything firm? If we're crossing a raging river, is there a rock that we can cling to? Hear this word from the Gospel: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." God, who created the heavens and the earth, sent his son to dwell amongst us; to reveal his will by his words; to reveal his love by his deeds; to reveal his mercy by his sacrifice. He wants us to share in the divine life of the Trinity, as children, as heirs, inheriting love that is beyond our own capacity. But revelation didn't begin with Jesus. God's plan began even earlier. It culminated in Jesus, but unfolded in stages.

All men can know of the creator by considering creation. Adam, in his state of original grace before the fall, was able to ponder each experience that he had with gratitude, welling up in an exclamation of names: "deer! strawberry! sky! woman!" Even after the fall, they weren't cut off from God. Adam and Eve were given clothes and the promise of redemption. And not for them alone. The covenant with Noah, signed by the rainbow in the sky, extends to all the nations. The chosen people, descended from the patriarchs, were entrusted with God's promise of unity to come; unity that we find in the Church. They were given law through Moses, and hope from the prophets for law engraved upon our hearts.

This hope borne by the poor and lowly, and even brought to the gentiles. Jonah went to "Nineveh, that great city", and proclaimed their destruction. "And the people of Nineveh believed God...[so he] changed his mind...and he did not do it."

Repentance is what is needed: turning our minds towards God. The people of Nineveh fasted and put on sack cloth. The Corinthians were told to turn from things in order to open their hearts to God. Jesus says, "repent, and believe in the good news." Renouncing sin and gaining salvation, receiving forgiveness with the gift of new life: these are required for us and made possible through the Holy Spirit by grace. Through our inner conversion, we can obtain social change that is just. With conversion, we open ourselves to truth. The psalm says, "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths." Equipped with truth that comes from grace, we can discern the right path - a narrow twisty path. It lies between forms of cowardice that permit evil, and forms of violence that worsen evil. And this is how we make Canada what it should be: loving God and neighbour; respecting others and their rights; and giving of ourselves what is due in justice (1889).