

Daily Meditation 05-20-24

A Mother's Wisdom in Resisting Ecclesial Complicity & Religious Nonsense

Good Morning.

In today's meditation, I share a story that I think is both funny and meaningful, even inspiring, from my mother, about not remaining passive, when institutions of power are not behaving well. Even, and especially, if they are religious institutions.

In the Saturday's Daily Meditation, I brought to your attention the interview that is occurring on Sunday evening with Pope Francis, on "60 Minutes." Now, I'm recording this on Sunday morning. You'll be seeing it on Monday morning. So, you may know more about that interview than I do at this stage. But there was an article about it, someone I guess, has seen it. And one of the questions asked was this:

"There are conservative bishops in the United States, that oppose your new efforts to revisit teachings and traditions. How do you address their criticism?" That was one of the questions laid on Pope Francis. And his response was:

Some conservatives cling to something, and do not want to see beyond that. It is a suicidal attitude. Because it is one thing to take tradition into account, to consider situations from the past. But quite another, is to be closed up inside a dogmatic box.

Those are good words coming from a Pope, in warning us that it is a suicidal attitude, to cling to rigid, boxed-in dogmas. Cardinal Newman, who's now canonized a Saint, wrote a very important book in the 19th century, on "The Development of Doctrine," meaning the evolution of doctrine. And those who are trying to freeze doctrine or dogma, are stepping outside of the scientific grasp of reality -- and that is, that this universe and everything in it is in flux, and flows in process. And nothing is rigid, including doctrines and dogmas. They do not stand still.

I look on dogma as kind of a playpen, in which we play with ideas and wonderful insights about the nature of reality and of spirituality. But it's not about freezing them. It's about playing with them, and bringing them forward for new generations and a new cultural context. And I'm so

glad to see the Pope talk about that. We don't box them up and then just deliver them as something frozen.

Now, the fellow who wrote this article about this interview, before any of us saw it, he talks about the "senior management" of religion, and how there's a conflict currently, between the American bishops and Pope Francis. And he says that the American bishops as a group, there are individuals who are with Pope Francis, who see beyond the boxed-in notion of dogma. But the dominant numbers exemplify the dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists who do not see eye to eye with Pope Francis. And in fact, they're resisting his ideas.

And his interpretation of what the Pope said is, and I think this is worth quoting: "The Pope explained, 'They were Dead Enders living under a rock,' although he used different words." So, my mother's response to Dead Enders living under a rock, is simply the "rock" of the church. And obviously, she's not the only one who has responded that way.

Now, today's Sunday is the Feast of Pentecost. And if Pentecost means anything, it is a celebration of imagination. It is a celebration of spirit. A spirit does not live in a box as something frozen, but is busy converting things, changing things, transforming things in profound ways. And so the spirit of Pentecost and the the season of Pentecost, is a season of celebrating our capacity to transform and be transformed, and to move on, and to bring imagination and science and art and for living theology, to new cultural situations, such as we face today in terms of our extinction of our species that is staring in our face due to climate change, and to changing our ways, and moving from the reptilian-based "I win you lose" -- a dynamic that is about empire building, and about war, and moving from that to something more thoroughly human and humane, such as compassion and justice, and especially justice for the poor.

So, let me just share with you what Thomas Merton wrote, in his book "The Bystander:"

Spirituality that preaches resignation under official brutalities, serve our acquiescence and frustration and sterility. And total submission to organized injustice, is one which has lost interest in holiness, and remains concerned only with a spurious notion of order.

That's from his book, "Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander," concerned with a spurious notion of order. I think that notion of a spurious notion of order is alive and well in a lot of these frozen

ecclesial persons, whose theology has nothing of flow, evolution, or therefore the Holy Spirit in it. Let us remember that "spirit" in Hebrew is feminine, "ruach." So the Holy Spirit is a naming of the feminine dimension to divinity. Maybe that's why it's been neglected for so long. And you need to realize that the Pentecost is a coming of the Spirit, who is a representative of feminine values such as compassion. Eternal values.

And then one more citation from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Any religion, which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and women, but is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion, only waiting for the day to be buried.

From Martin Luther King Jr. Beware of a spiritually moribund religion, one that refuses to critique social and economic conditions. This pope has critiqued social and economic conditions. He did so in his brilliant essay on "Laudato Si," which is about caring for Mother Earth. Both there and in other writings, he has critiqued unbridled capitalism, consumer capitalism as we know it. And for that, he is being persecuted, not only by secular forces, but by his own bishops in America who are so much in bed with billionaires (literally), and who, like Opus Dei, seek to climb the ladder of financial success, and escape the realities of spirituality, the values of the gospel, care about the poor, and those who are not at the top of the ladders.

Thank you, we'll see you next week. Happy Pentecost.