

Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 10, 2020

Living from Our "Godded" Center

The Scriptures proclaimed today offer us a very clear and direct message: *Nothing compares to living from our "Godded" centers, where contemplating and acting are fully connected.* Let us take a look first at the contemplative dimension of such a life as set forth today in the Johannine Gospel.

I remember so well the first time I truly *heard* these words that Jesus spoke to his disciples and friends at his last supper. It was right here in this building in the late 1950s. In our formative years as IHM Sisters, among other subjects, we had wonderful courses on Scripture and theology. On this one particular day during a Scripture class in B-02 on the bottom floor, Sister Benedicta – later known as Sister Margaret Brennan – led us into the deeper meaning of these words. I am sure I had heard them before from the pulpits of my parish churches in Detroit. But the way she explained these texts, well, *inner bells* began to ring in me!

What? Jesus, this Jewish man who, while enjoying a glass of wine and a good meal, tells his followers that he is *one with God* and that he is also *one with us* and thus WE ALSO are *one with God*, that *we are in God* and *God is in us!* "What?" I said to myself, "this is really *big news!*" I remember leaving the classroom and coming right up to this Chapel to contemplate what I had just heard. I can point to the pew I sat in! I had only about 15 minutes to do so before I had to be in Sister Mariella's kitchen to take up my household duties – putting scoops of butter on plates, I think, to serve to about 500 Academy girls.

IHM Sisters of a certain age might remember a similar experience, for we also had to memorize Chapters 14 through 17 of John's Gospel, AND we had to recite them to our beloved teacher, Sister Benedicta! Now this was a formidable task for me because I am not gifted with ease at memorization. From that experience, though, I have never forgotten certain phrases in those four chapters: "*Abide in me as I abide in you. ... I am the vine; you are the branches. The ones who abide in me will bear much fruit for without me you can do nothing. ... I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. ... As my father-mother has loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love. ... I no longer call you servants but friends. ... Go now and bear the fruit of our love that is in you.*" Up to that time, I had prayed *to* God, not from and in God and with God in me! What a change, eh!

And so, what are some of the *actions*, the *fruits*, that came to be from this compelling and transforming teaching of Jesus – Jesus, the Eternal Word AND Word Made Flesh, whose words are *never* abstractions but *always* concrete actions – Light producing enlightenment, expansive and liberating Love always leading to more and more inclusion! The first followers of Jesus, after some reassuring post-Easter appearances, went forward with new-found courage and knowledge and understanding and wisdom, preaching and teaching and healing as Jesus did and always in his name. They

proclaim Jesus as prophet and messiah in Jerusalem and Galilee and they also branch out into many other parts of the Roman empire where they encounter new cultures, new needs, and new tensions.

Today, we heard from First Peter, an Epistle written in elegant Greek and sent to many new communities all across Asia Minor to encourage them as they struggled with competing messages from Greek and Roman cultures and especially with the reigning beliefs in many gods. The Letter cleverly connects many texts from the Hebrew Scriptures to remind these new Christians that they too are “a holy nation, God’s *own* people” and also “called into God’s wonderful light,” What a phrase that is, eh! Is that not compelling – to be in the *very Light of God* and to be called to *live* in and *from* it? First Peter of course also reflects the patriarchal structures of the times permeating these cultures – upholding slavery and the submission of wives to husbands, for instance. But there are also counter-weight teachings in the Letter and elsewhere in the New Testament that have been, and must continue to be, pulled forward today to realize fully the message of Jesus: that *all of us are loved completely by God*.

The first reading from Acts also shows us some cultural tensions, pointed out ironically by the Hellenists to the Jewish 12. They call a meeting, though, to address a particular problem – namely, the huge gap that exists between their enthusiastic and effective preaching and the neglect of so many widows. Women in these patriarchal cultures were completely dependent on their husbands for their livelihood and so to become a widow was to become *completely* destitute.

This incoherence between *preaching* the Word and *doing* the Word is of course counter to the proclamation of Jesus. The leaders do address it by creating deacons through the laying on of hands and commissioning them to provide food and care for the widows and others, too, in need. The Word preached becomes the Word done through a practical and of course still patriarchal solution, for only men could carry out such a public organizing act. But again, there are counter-weighting texts in the Scriptures and other early Church documents that *name* women and show how deeply they were involved in BOTH preaching AND caring.

The contemporary American poet, Paul Mariani, writes compellingly of how we not only have to *know* the Mystery of God but also to *inhabit* it (Mariani, *The Mystery of It All*, p. 198), to be *grasped* by it, so to speak. So, let’s do so, surrendering to it in prayer and acting from it. And today, Mother’s Day, let us celebrate it, recognizing all the “mothering” happening by moms, dads, sisters, brothers, grandparents, teachers, health care workers, food service people, daughters and sons shopping for parents, and so many sorrowing for their loved ones dying alone. Let *all of us* give compassioning care wherever we can, grasped as we are by the very love of God. Let us all live from our “Godded” center!

Offered by Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM
 Texts: Acts 6:1-7; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12