

Liturgy of the Word

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by Lynne Moldenhauer IHM

We find ourselves in a time that deeply needs the message from Isaiah and the Gospel readings today. The rich hope extended to us as it is extended to Israel by God can be for us a source of comfort in our fear and a soothing balm in what feels like captivity. We are not used to such restrictions, and yet spring has come. Trees are budding with the promise of life renewed. We have more light in each day.

The constancy of creation is a powerful blessing for us. Has the universe issued a deep demand to us: "Slow down ... become Aware ...;" "be still and know that I am God," especially in this time?

In the reading from Isaiah it is revealed that a new creation is on the horizon – one that is like a new Eden with "long life, abundant food, and a renewed closeness with God." Imagine a promise like that from God. Returning to the place where we started and, perhaps, as the poet T. S. Elliott says, "knowing it for the first time."

How beautiful this passage is in revealing to us how much our Beloved Creator wants for us – fullness in life in every way. "I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in my people." Can we just let that sink in?

And in keeping with Isaiah's universalist theology the relationship with God expands beyond the nation to a transformation of the cosmos – understanding cosmos to mean the "universe as a well-ordered whole." God wants life for us and for us to live and be people who are a source of joy and exultation for the Divine. What can this mean for us in these times?

In John's Gospel, we see Jesus encountering a royal official from Capernaum who learned that Jesus had arrived. He approached Jesus and begged him to heal his young son who was dying. One might think that by Jesus' response that he was irritated by the request when he seemed to complain that people needed signs and wonders in order to believe. I love the persistence of this father and it would seem that Jesus did too. As he assures the man that his son would live and tells him to go. What is beautiful in this story is what happens next. We are told that the man "believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way." He did not wait for news from home or a sign as proof. He trusted. He believed.

Then on his way home he received word that his son was recovering and it started at the time that Jesus told him he would live. Extraordinary faith! In this story we are taught that Jesus "will act, but his actions are not governed by expectations or demands for signs or wonders. He will act because giving life is part of doing God's work." What can this mean for us in these times?

Finally, as there is no liturgy or Liturgy of the Word tomorrow, and we honor our beloved St. Oscar de Romero, we reflect upon this marvelous man of faith who revealed for us the heart of Liberation theology. He was certainly one whose life revealed the concerns of God in the reading from Isaiah and the actions of Jesus in John's Gospel. Oscar de Romero was devoted to the poor, and like Jesus, began to shake the tree of a Church that was too embedded with the wealthy and the politically powerful. He became deeply prophetic as we know, and this cost him his life. He said: "One who is committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor ... to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive, to be found dead."

He was killed on March 24, 1980, while saying Mass. "Powerful prelates claimed that he did not die for his faith but for mixing himself up in politics." This was challenged. His death was not caused by motives that were simply political, but by hatred for a faith that, imbued with charity, would not be silent in the face of the injustices that relentlessly and cruelly slaughtered the poor and their defenders." As he once remarked: "Martyrdom is a great gift from God that I do not believe I have earned. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life then may my blood be the seed of liberty, and a sign of hope that will soon become a reality. ..."

The desire of God expressed in Isaiah, the commitment of Jesus to giving life as God's work, and the sacrifice of St. Oscar de Romero for the life of the poor should root our days of confinement with much to pray about and transform our thinking and ways of being.