

## Reflection Sept 4, 2020

Lk. 5:33-39

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The disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast and offer prayers; common parts of their religious observance. But Jesus' disciples eat and drink. What does that mean? Jesus answers that when the bridegroom is taken away, the disciples will fast.

But this really is not about fasting, is it? I always had problems with the mathematics of fasting and if two meals equaled the third. But, if we look at the other parables, there is some bigger question here. Put a patch of new fabric on an old cloak? Put new wine in old wine skins? They knew well that you don't do those things. What is Jesus trying to tell them ... to tell us?

There have been other teachings from Jesus that are similar – teachings on what was done in the past and what ought to be done.

- “You have heard it said,” you shall not kill ... but I say to you, you are not to be angry with your brother or sister.
- “You have heard it said” an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist.
- “You have heard it said” love your neighbor and hate your enemy, but I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

The list goes on and on in Matthew 5. We were raised on the Gospel, but Jesus' listeners were trained in the older law. This was radical. Still, we have to admit there is something of that old spirit within us. We ask if he really meant us to act that way. Jesus' teachings are new; they are compelling and challenging. But the disciples need to know if he *is* the awaited one.

I find myself thinking about the time John the Baptist was in prison. I always thought John *knew* who Jesus was. But on this occasion, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus outright: “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” (Mt. 11:3) The disciples were struggling with the old and the new. Wine and cloaks were one thing. The identity of the Messiah was quite another.

Jesus tells them to go back and tell John what they hear and see. It is, in a way a symbolic, seemingly indirect, answer. Still, for one who knows what is hoped for from the Messiah, it is concrete proof: the blind see; the deaf hear; the lame walk; blessed is the one who is not scandalized by me.

Those observing Jesus, struggled with the old and new rituals and practices. What of the familiar fasting and prayers were they to retain? The old wine was good ... the familiar practices ... the known ritual and prayers. Do you remember struggles with letting go of what was familiar from before the Council? Or what seemed right in the congregation before successive post-Vatican Chapters? Some of us easily and joyfully welcomed the new; some of us struggled to change.

But wine is not the best image when we are speaking about welcoming the new. Aged wine is good, and a bit may help us welcome newness. We are not called to the fasting of those who do not have the “bridegroom” of the parable always with them.

How does Christ’s presence in my life help me with the fasting we call “letting go?”