

Reflection

Friday of 33rd week of Ordinary Time

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In the Gospel today, we look at an ending, an event that takes place near the end of Jesus' life, the cleansing of the Temple, which leads the authorities to be more determined to get rid of him as they wonder what authority Jesus has to interrupt the "order of Temple practices."

Yes, the *order* set of selling animals for offering sacrifice. After all, it was a convenience and help for pilgrims coming from long distances not to have to bring their own animals with them. A well-intentioned service had long moved from its good intention to opportunity to make money, a little cheating here and there, to make a profit. It was too bad if the poor got caught as "collateral damage." After all, did they not have the right to make a little money? The hearts of the religious leaders had long grown cold, empty of compassion and misguided away from the true purpose of their leadership.

Jesus shows human emotion – anger – a comfort for many who read this Gospel passage. Jesus got angry. At times, all of us experience anger; knowing that Jesus also was angry is a comfort.

What is behind anger? It is a gut feeling in our body that something is not right. Something is out of order. It goes against what I value or the perception of myself. It throws my value upside down, as if it doesn't matter. Richard Rohr says, "Anger protects that which is loved." Anger calls for reflection, for going deeper to see what is within. Why did that affect me so deeply? What is out of order? What does it mean?

It is not bad to be angry. It is, what I do with the anger that is right or wrong, not that I am angry. Anger, as Jesus had, was right. Needed. The energy that comes from anger is the same energy needed for courage, for making decisions to change a situation, to put things in right order. Jesus acted. A message came through. He was there to disturb the present order. Things had to change. The practices of religion were not right. It was time for new authority, a new WAY.

That is what Jesus felt deeply when he turned over the tables of the money changers at the Temple. Things were all out of order. There was no compassion, no real care to help people. The Temple area had become a Den of Thieves. The poor coming to the Temple were being exploited. Jesus had a different message, one of compassion, value for the poor, the oppressed. Things needed to change. The old order must go. Just as in our society today, racism, white privilege, rejection of those seeking asylum, exploiting people through an economy that favors the wealthy and neglects the needs of those struggling to survive. Those evils need to go, to be changed, if we are to be a just society.

At the Temple, a new order was at hand. A new authority was being ushered in. Jesus and the values he taught on the Temple steps and throughout the land were announcing the presence of the Kingdom of God. Even though darkness, persecution, faced Jesus and his followers. He was bringing new light, new hope, the revelation of the face of God, a new awareness of how each of us needs to participate in bringing about that Kingdom.

The reading from the Book of Revelation presents us with that striking image of the angel handing over the scroll with the words, "Take it and eat it." The same words the angel spoke to Ezekiel to prepare him for his task to prophesy, to speak the words of God when things were "out of order." The same words Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, giving us the Bread of Life. A sweetness like honey in the mouth, receiving the promises of hope. However, sour in the stomach when the struggle, the suffering and darkness accompany what it means to participate in the liberating mission of Jesus, to follow the call.

The book of Revelation was written to encourage the Community of Faith to stand firm and avoid compromise despite the threats before them. We also are called to savor the Word of God, to digest it, integrate it with what is happening in us, tasting the "sweetness like honey," aware that the sour stomach is the cost we are called to go through on the way to cooperating with God to bring about the new order. Our eyes and heart need to remain on the vision, the sweetness. A new courage awaits us as we take on the tasks of life today, to face and acknowledge what is out of order in our own lives, to face our own participation in the evils affecting our society. We seek to change ourselves as we participate in the evolving universe of our Cosmic Christ.

As this liturgical year ends, we look back and look forward to what and how God is calling each of us now to participate through circumstances of our lives. That is our hope.