

Reflection for April 12, 2021

Judith Bonini, IHM

After the great joy of Easter week, our readings focus on the challenge of following Jesus. At one time, Daniel Berrigan quipped, “Before you get serious about Jesus, first consider how you will look on wood.” Peter and John are imprisoned for boldly speaking out the Good News of the Resurrection and healing a man born lame. After being admonished **not** speak of or do signs in Jesus’ name, they are released. In the Gospel, we find a bewildered Nicodemus, trying to understand Jesus’ saying about “being born again.”

Jesus’ invitation to Nicodemus is to look at things from an upside-down perspective. Jesus entered our world teaching faith, love, forgiveness. But he was rejected and subject to death on a cross. In the stories of the crucifixion, Jesus is taunted, mocked and challenged. How did God respond to that? No commentary, no defense, no counter-challenge, just **silence**. Jesus dies in silence – inside God’s silence and inside the world’s incomprehension.

We can let ourselves be perpetually scandalized by the triumph of evil, pain and suffering: the Jewish Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, COVID-19, tsunamis, wild fires, endless wars, nuclear weapons, climate change, children at our border seeking a place to live in peace. Where is God in all of this? What is God’s answer?

God’s answer is the Resurrection. God does not rescue. Regardless of how evil appears to triumph, LIFE does triumph over death, Good *does* triumph over evil. Resurrection forcefully makes this point. God has the last word – the Resurrection of Jesus. This is the mystery Nicodemus must learn.

We know that the Apostles ignored the admonishment of the Jewish leaders. They continued to speak out “Jesus is Risen” with boldness and courage. They suffered continually for their faith. As have many Christians up to and including our time.

A journalist, Mark Danner, describes the massacre of a young woman by the Salvadoran military. They plundered a village raping many of the women. One young woman, a Christian, who they raped many times, and subsequently tortured her. The whole time she, clinging to her faith, sang hymns, even after they shot her. She kept on singing, weaker now. They shot her again, but she kept singing. Desperate to stop her singing, they used their machetes to decapitate her. The singing stopped. As it is with Jesus, her voice lives on.

We may never be required to defend our faith as she did. However, the times we live in demand boldness of us. The pandemic has opened our eyes to the culture of death that surrounds us. Instead of feeding our struggling sisters and brothers, we create more and more nuclear arms. Slowly, we are owning our enslavement of our Black brothers and sisters. The children at our borders reveal two things: the damage done by climate change – two devastating hurricanes – and corrupt governments.

So the question before us in this Resurrection time: how can we express boldly our belief in the power of God and take it out into our ordinary lives?