

Monday, Week Five Ordinary Time

I Kings 8:1-7, 9-13

Mark 6:53-56

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Today's scriptures speak to us of the dynamic presence of God. How does awareness of that presence affect us?

We see in the reading from First Kings, the great celebration and gathering for the Inauguration of the magnificent Temple that Solomon built. The Holy of Holies, the Inner Sanctuary, was the part of the Temple that held the Ark of the Covenant and within it, the Two Stone Tablets that God had given Moses on Mt Horeb. For the occasion, many animals were brought for sacrifice to honor God's presence with them. We remember that David had offered to build Yahweh a worthy Temple. Yet, God let David know, through Nathan, his prophet, that the humble Tent that contained the Ark of the Covenant was sufficient during David's reign as King. It was where God wanted to be at that time.

But now, during King Solomon's reign until the Babylonian Exile, God's glory **filled** the Temple. The sign was that God dwelt in the cloud. That was the recognizable sign to the Israelites, just as the cloud at the time of the Exodus, indicated Yahweh's presence and protection, had guided them from slavery in Egypt to freedom. Now with the Temple, Yahweh was present, in a seemingly more honorable way and visibly close to the people of Jerusalem. Dutifully, the Hebrew people returned to worship their God in the Temple of Jerusalem for its great feasts each year. They wanted to be close and experience that presence of Yahweh.

The Gospels these past weeks have offered stories of Jesus' healing presence. In today's gospel again, when Jesus traveled to the other side of the Lake, possibly for the chance to get away, he is recognized. Immediately, people begin to bring the sick to him to be healed by his very presence, knowing that even being able to touch the tassel on his cloak would bring healing. Jesus had a healing presence. His very presence was powerful, just as the cloud in the Temple was a sign of Yahweh's protection.

Truly being present to people is powerful also. There is something about a quality of respect, of truly being cared about, being listened to and being responded to, that can touch your spirit. We cannot always put words to our experience, but we know something is different when we are with a person truly present to us. That person has impressed us in some way by their manner or expression. Can you think of someone whose presence has been that powerful for you?

I experienced that kind of presence in South Africa during a personal exchange with Nelson Mandela. He had an awesome presence. About 6 weeks after he had been released from prison, he came to our place in Mpophomeni Township. We were one of 7 local Black communities that had been attacked by the opposing political party. Our Church had been ransacked because from there, we buried anyone who had been killed in the rampant political violence in our area. In retaliation, all 59 windowpanes on one side of the church were smashed and cloths had been set on fire. A week or so later, Nelson Mandela with other leaders of the African National Congress came to see the damage, and briefly spoke to the communities to encourage the people in the struggle for liberation. At our place, before looking at the damaged church, Mandela stopped at our house, right next to the Church. As he came in, he stood in the

doorway and took time to talk with me, asking about our living there- the only whites in this Black Township. I told him why we had asked to live here, and he listened attentively. I felt the power of his awesome presence. There was such a quality to him, to his presence. I thought that was what the presence of Jesus must have been like.

Today, we are aware that we are in an epoch of change. A great part of that change is growing into a new deeper level of consciousness. We have long read of mystics who had that consciousness, another level of seeing what was hidden to others. Hildegarde of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, and Etty Hillesum in our times. Perhaps, we are aware of a new level of consciousness growing within ourselves. Our own spirituality has at times led us to deeper recognition of God present in people, within ourselves, within creation, in the universe. The writings of Thomas Merton, Teilhard deChardin and other modern mystics are helping us to grow in deeper understanding and consciousness of God's presence everywhere—in nature, in matter, in life events, in the everyday—in the ordinary as well as in designated sacred places.

If we grow in that awareness of God's presence surrounding us, within and beyond us, will it not bring a different quality to our presence with one another? Richard Rohr noted in one of his recent meditations that "How we relate to God, is how we relate to everything else. How we relate to the world, is how we are actively relating to God."

That speaks to me of quality of presence. How do we nourish that quality within ourselves?

Perhaps practicing Mindfulness, being attentive to what is going on within our own spirit; being attentive to God's presence, staying there. It may mean new efforts to be attentive to the persons we are with, truly listening to them, respecting them, loving them with the love of God that is within us and within them. Maybe, like Jesus, we can bring a healing presence to one another and to our world. All of us are in some way, in need of healing.