

Un-Quiet Word for July 3rd, 2022 - Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

...the LORD's power shall be revealed to his servants.

Isaiah 66:14

Providing is Proclaiming

One of the joys of these first days as a new parish is the fact of having another priest (shepherd) among us- a brand new priest (just ordained on June 18th) . It takes me back to my first years as a priest (almost 16 years ago). Those were the best days, full of life, zeal and passion. Everything that you do means something. You do not forget your first experiences at almost anything.

My first assignment was at Saint Joan of Arc parish on Lincoln Street. One of my duties was to visit the sick at Lincoln Towers (I enjoyed getting out of the rectory, visiting the sick – to this day). However, one particular case was really challenging, visiting this individual turned out to be very challenging and draining. I wanted to give up. My bi-weekly visits turned into weekly visits, constant calls at the parish. I could notice almost at once a neediness, but more ‘an absence/ a Void, no family, no friend, no company, a Aloneness that was deep. I think, it was a case of mental health (that is off the roof these days).

I asked my pastor what I was to do? He said, ‘all priests in their parish ministry encounter one or two people who are at the deep end of life and what they need is not so much solutions or answers but ‘your presence’. They want to know deep down that ‘God is here, God hasn’t forgotten them. You (father) provide through your simple presence and listening, that the ‘kingdom of God is at hand for you’.

The absence of God is real for many today. Many feel an acute emptiness, a void. There is hunger, a restlessness for joy and happiness. Does God care? Does he even exist? What do I have to go through? Mental health and depression are too big of issues to tackle, yet even still, we as disciples of Christ (people who believe that God is here) are challenged to ‘bring to, to provide to a very thirsty world the ‘presence of God’- that they may know, through providing for their needs that the kingdom of God is at hand (it has arrived). This in many ways is the mission of a parish. Proclaim the kingdom by providing.

To a very distressed community, the word of the prophet Isaiah in the first reading, provides reassurance and hope:

Thus says the LORD:

*Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad because of her,
all you who love her;
exult, exult with her,
all you who were mourning over her!*

*For thus says the LORD:
Lo, I will spread prosperity over Jerusalem like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing torrent.
As nurslings, you shall be carried in her arms,
and fondled in her lap;
as a mother comforts her child,
so will I comfort you;*

*When you see this, your heart shall rejoice
and your bodies flourish like the grass;
the LORD's power shall be known to his servants.*

Like a mother who provides, so shall Yahweh provide for the needs of the community and when he does, the power of faith will be proclaimed.

Yes, many people have faith, many people keep the commandments, but it is not enough. It is necessary to believe that God's promises will be realized. And that is where we come in by providing for the needs of others.

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? Disciples are essentially people who 'are sent'. Our vocation requires us to movement, to action and to respond:

*At that time the Lord appointed seventy-two others
whom he sent ahead of him in pairs
to every town and place he intended to visit.
He said to them,
"The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few;
so ask the master of the harvest
to send out laborers for his harvest.*

Jesus requires a certain single mindedness of them. Neither to stop for hospitality or delay in conversation on the road. Whether they are rejected or received, they are to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand.

How? Cure the sick. bring peace. The pillars of building any church community is to imitate Christ the founder, to do as he did. Providing will proclaim the kingdom of God.

A small footnote or detail requires our utmost attention, especially as we begin this new parish:

***the Lord appointed seventy-two others
whom he sent ahead of him in pairs (two by two)***

A story is told about Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson who set out to accomplish a task that for over three decades had been labeled impossible- free climbing the dawn wall of El Capitan in Yosemite Valley.

Free climbing means using only one's hands and feet to ascend a rock's natural features, while employing ropes and other gear only to stop a fall. For two years Tommy and Kevin had mapped out their strategy for conquering each of the thirty-two pitches or sections of El Capitan.

Over these two years, they had forged both a deep friendship and a mutual partnership that relied at some moments on Tommy's greater skill in climbing and at other moments on Kevin's optimism and athleticism. They began their climb as a team and resolved that no matter what happened they would complete it as a team.

Over the first six days they made it up fourteen grueling pitches, and on the seventh day Tommy Caldwell, the more experienced climber, made it up the fifteenth pitch, which is the most treacherous section of the dawn wall.

But Kevin Jorgesen remained trapped on the fifteenth pitch. For the next four days he fell time and again in his effort to overcome the flawlessly smooth face of this most difficult section of El Capitan. Now time became the enemy for both climbers, because the longer they remained exposed on the wall the more likely that a bad weather front would move in and end the climb for both.

Kevin was aware that he was holding Tommy back, and he pleaded with his friend and mentor to abandon him and move onward so that at least one of them might conquer the dawn wall. But Tommy Caldwell would not move on; ***more than anything he wanted them both to finish together as they had started together.***

For a total of ten days, he stood with Kevin Jorgesen as Jorgesen tried to overcome the fifteenth pitch, and Tommy made clear that he would never abandon his friend. Miraculously, on the eleventh day Kevin Jorgesen conquered the fifteenth pitch, and they began to move up the final one thousand feet together, accompanying each other until they reached the plateau where their families and the world were waiting.

The point of the story is the grace of mutual accompaniment. This is the real miracle that occurred on El Capitan. And it is this grace of mutual accompaniment that must form the heart of the relationship of a Pastor with his local church community. This grace must also be at the heart of each of the parishioners in a community.

We will build this new community only with this spirit and grace. We must 'walk together with Christ' as our head and leader. We must seek to see a reservoir of goodness in each other. Find the richness of experience and listen to the other. Mistakes will be inevitable, but in this spirit we will move forward regardless.

May our Blessed Mother, Our Lady of Hope, accompany every step of this new journey.

Fr. Anthony Mpagi,
Pastor of Our Lady of Hope