

Virtual Worship – Prayer & Homily

Sunday, May 17, 2020

Inspiration + Necessity

Prayer

Breathe deep the breath of life – find your breath, center down,
feel below you the earth and its ancient turning,
feel above you the sky and its ancient stars,
and you, here, held between them – alive, awake, and here -
know that here you are named and you are known as beloved.
Join me in this time of meditation and prayer, first by sharing silence together.

Spirit of Life, Source of Love,
God of a thousand names and beyond all naming,

Each day, we are asked to create a life,
to take what the day has offered –
it's joy, it's sorrow, it's uncertainty, it's grief, it's fear, it's surprises,
and craft and create what we can –
with resilience, and possibility, compassion and love.

Sometimes, the world we wake to is not as we had hoped –
not what feels right, seems right,
and it seems quite impossible, at times, to create a good day out of it.

May we remember all that the world has to offer,
and the skills that we have, meager as they may feel,
to settle our soul, to show compassion, to do what we can –
nothing more, nothing less.

We hold in our hearts this day all those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit.
I invite you to bring the names you are holding in your heart this day –
in joy or in sorrow, and silently or aloud now in this sacred hour,
to speak their names...
For all those names, and many others, may we all be held in love and grace.

These words of meditation come from Sufi mystic poet of the 14th century, Hafiz,

You carry
All the ingredients
To turn your life into a nightmare-
Don't mix them!
You have all the genius
To build a swing in your backyard
For God.
That sounds
Like a hell of a lot more fun.
Let's start laughing, drawing blueprints,
Gathering our talented friends.
I will help you.
With my divine lyre and drum.
Hafiz
Will sing a thousand words,
You can take into your hands,
Like golden saws,
Sliver hammers,
Polished teakwood,
Strong silk rope.
You carry all the ingredients
To turn your existence into joy,
Mix them
Mix them!

Amen.

Homily – Inspiration + Necessity

The dough just wasn't working.

I thought I had done everything –
measured with the scale, that fancy little device that upped my baking game –
read the directions over and over again –

attended to the measurements, followed the guideposts,
mixed the right amounts with precision,
kneaded for the correct duration,
placed it carefully in the container, with a light coating of oil,
marking the appropriate amount of time,

and waited – overnight, for the yeast to work –
for the air pockets to form,
took it out on the counter,
heated the oven,

and then, began to get nervous that it would happen again –
that dough, though I had done everything right, I thought,
when I went to form it,
would snap back, refuse to move and stretch and form
into the pristine pizza I kneaded it to be –

and it did. It snapped back at me.
For the third, or fourth, or whatever aggravating amount of times,
and, while the flavor was still good,
I ate it, despite its mockery of me and my baking skills –
luckily it tasted pretty good – it was not as I knew it could be.

Shortly there after, I phoned a friend – a couple of them –
my brother who I had gotten the recipe from to ask all the little details –
we joked I could drive to his house in the cities, and as is the norm these days,
standing outside his window looking in to watch the process.

And I messaged a friend who is a baker,
and he simply replied –

*if the dough is tense, let it rest –
when you pick it up don't squeeze it, even though its awfully fun,
let it rest and be gentle and let gravity be your friend.*

And the words I heard for the bread
where the very words I needed for my soul, my mind, my body, my heart –
if your tense, rest –
don't just pick everything up and try to squeeze every freedom you can out of it –
even though it seems awfully fun –
let it rest, be gentle,
let the gravity of earth hold you in place.

Let it rest.

*If the phone rings, writes the poet, in a mantra –
if some distraction, some interruption comes in the midst of whatever practice is giving you
grounding and life -
don't answer it – don't answer it –
you're creating, sculpting, you're in heaven.*

Staying put isn't really feeling like heaven right now, is it –
as much as there is wisdom and truth
that we can find love and abundance and beauty anywhere,
right here, right now – which is true –
there is a tension, a longing,
to squeeze out of these confines
and move freely again –
to gather in places teeming with life and vibrancy –
church, classrooms, restaurants – all of it –

but like the dough, if you are kneading too tensely,
if you push it too far, too quick,
it snaps back, it constricts, it doesn't take the shape it should,
because it's working too hard to be something it's not ready to be.
And so the question is,
how are we honing our skills right now,
to work with whatever ingredients we've got?

Because, as the Sufi poet Hafiz writes,

we for sure have all the ingredients to turn our lives into a nightmare –
don't mix them, he writes!

It's like we're on one of those horrible cooking shows – like chopped,
where you're given a basket of random ingredients –
like gummy bears and garlic and peanut butter –
and you're asked to make some gourmet meal out of it.

The question is, for the spirit, right now,
what are you going to do with the ingredients you've been given?

How are you going to bake or cook,
which many of us have been doing more during this time,
with whatever ingredients in this hand-basket going who knows where –

what skills have we got, or are we creating,
to craft this life into as much joy as we can muster,
as much stillness as we can manage –
to give ourselves permission to weep at times, and laugh at times,
and have that extra chocolate, or whatever it is,
because you know, it's the little things that are saving your life.

A colleague of mine recently posted, and I found this so helpful –
we all need little things to look forward to –
not like the big things of re-gathering with large crowds,
getting back to normal –
right now we are living in a time of communal collective trauma,
in this forced idleness,
even as things begin to crack open,
we know we can't push them too far without snapping back...

So, she said, we need the little things, lower expectations,
take it down a few notches to the smallest level of what to look forward to,
like things that can happen in a couple of hours.

Plan to have a nice cup of tea, or coffee, at a certain time,
plan to take a news break, which you should do often,
it will be there to update you whenever you need it –
but take a break, and grab a book,
or play some music,
or take a walk –

mark your day, mark the hours,
by setting down the grand hopes for what might be,
and settling in to the necessity of rest –
being gentle with yourself and others,
finding little moments, little things you love,
and plan them, regularly, as much as you can,
and take a breath,
and love what you can love –
whatever you have access to, capacity for –

for me – it's often the next snack or meal,
or the break in the backyard,
or the ridiculous evening show.

Because, as the poet writes,
this life is always about the balance of
inspiration + necessity –

like from the old cookbooks.

Crude and intuitive measurements
like a knob of butter and a goodly amount of flour –
as he writes,

*Perhaps that's what's most interesting
is how recipes were precisely not recipes at first
but inspiration-plus-necessity,
a need to use whatever was at hand,
no text can explain it,*

he writes,

*the leap of faith involved in plunging hands
deep into a mass of bread dough
and kneading hard until it is "just right."*

*What is just right? Maybe the way it feels,
the part of a recipe that's beyond
the recipe, beyond what nourishes,*

beyond hunger and beyond ourselves.

Huh – how true –
to use whatever is just at hand right now.
no text explaining how to do this –

having just a pinch of this, a touch of that,
gentleness, rest –

we have no instructions
for these ingredients.

Like notes on a page that come to life in the sound –
they come to life in memory and melody
by the feeling they create –

*parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme –
or a spoonful of sugar –*

in a time when there are those in our world,
and those parts of ourselves, who want to fly upward and outward to reach the sun, like Icarus,

but instead, the hard spiritual life is to weep for what we have lost, and will lose,
and to plunge our hands, our hearts,
into the dough, the ingredients we've got to work with,
and now,
figure out what skills we have
to make what we can out of what we have.

It's amazing what they can do with those baskets on chopped –
it's amazing what you can do in hard times –
*to build a swing for God, for love, for hope
right in your backyard – right in your heart.*

I'm going to do my best
to let the bread, and the baker,
and while we're at it, the candlestick maker –

to be my guide –
to remind me of the need to just let it rest,
the need for gentleness,
with myself and others -

to look forward to the miracles of the hours:
morning coffee with a spoonful of sugar, and some cream –
the midday walk,
the growing sunshine,
the song of the birds –
for comedy central
and poetry and pizza
and distant waves –

because it is still a miracle that we're here,
and we have found a way to be together, such as it is,
and give love and hope and beauty the time, the space, they need – to rise.