

1-31-2021 4th Sunday of Epiphany.

Welcome, friends, to our liturgy for January 31st.

We begin in the name of God, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

May all that we have received and the gifts of our lives, may all that the Spirit would open us to nurture, sustain, and give us the grace to imagine what we can become for these times of such great need, we pray. Amen.

The first lesson for today is from the very beginning of the **Book of Lamentations**.

*How lonely sits the city that once was full of people.
How like a widow she has become, she that was once great among the nations.
She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. She weeps
bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks. Among all her lovers, she has no one
to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her. They have
become her enemies. The roads to Jerusalem mourn, for no one comes to the
festivals. All her gates are desolate. Her priests groan, her young people grieve,
and their lot is bitter.*

Psalm 111

I thank God with all my heart
for the gifts God has given humankind.
Uncountable are God's miracles,
immeasurable God's love.
God has formed us in God's own image
and kindled truth within our minds.
God has filled each day with splendor
and given us eyes to see,
given us hearts that can comprehend,
spirits that stand in awe.
God has also permitted us
knowledge beyond our wisdom,
and has granted us, in our unripeness,

the power to destroy the earth.
I praise God's fathomless mercy
and thank God for this difficult grace.
All beings perform God's covenant
and act out the primal law:
that whatever we reap, we have sown,
and what we give, we receive.
To know this is the beginning of wisdom;
to live it is the path to true life.

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Praise to the God who is. Praise God who was. Praise to God is to come for ages
unending. Amen.

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The Gospel for today is from **Mark chapter 1, starting with verse 21.**

They went as far as Capernaum, and at once on the Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue, where he began to teach. And his teaching made a deep impression on them because, unlike the scribes, he taught them with authority. And at once in their synagogue, there was a man with an unclean spirit, and he shouted, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked it saying, "Be quiet! Come out of him!" And the unclean spirit threw the man into convulsions and with a loud cry went out of him. The people were astonished. They started to ask each other what it all meant, saying, "Here is a teaching that is new, and with authority behind it: he gives orders even to unclean spirits and they obey him." And Jesus' reputation at once spread everywhere, through all the surrounding Galilean countryside.

The Word of God. Praise to you, O Christ.

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In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

When have you experienced true authority? We tend to associate authority with power, the muscle to back it up. But I'm talking to you about true authority. When

hearing about or experiencing true authority, there is a resonance within, a sense of gladness, openness, relief, assent, that makes me feel connected and in the flow of life.

The late author Barry Lopez wrote about people living outside--that it is a whole 'nother world experience if you live outside--perhaps as indigenous people have in previous generations, so the Inuit peoples of the Arctic Circle across the North, folks in the deserts of Africa, or the Aborigines of Australia. People who live inside cannot imagine the world of those who live outside all the time.

Today being an outsider means you don't count. And when you don't count, you don't understand. And the temptation for those who are outsiders, is to blame others, is to scapegoat others, as often times one has already been scapegoated.

Julian of Norwich, who lived in the 14th century said 600 years ago, *"For the most part--and this is really important--for the most part, life's trials come from not understanding ourselves."* Now this is a great mystic of the church and I invite you to absorb this. *"For the most part, life's trials come from not understanding ourselves ."*

Jesus was an outsider. He was birthed, lived, and died as an outsider. Here's a wonderful painting entitled, *'Jesus Outside the City'*. He was always outside the circles of power. He was wandering and on the move. And Jesus can never be categorized. Jesus was ec-centric, which means outside the circle, outside the in-crowd.

And his authority comes not with the approval of those in power; his authority comes not just from deep within. His authority comes from the depths of the cosmos. He speaks. We listen. He catches us up, time and time again.

Today, I'd like to share some comments for the introduction I gave for our *Opening Our Hearts* Retreat. These are entitled ,*"Grounding, Grieving, and Grappling"*. I know some of you will hear this twice, but I don't think it will hurt you. We're offering this Retreat as a means for seeking wisdom.

The first thing to know is that spiritual people are always outsiders, always outside. We will never fit in. Spiritual people are always called to pay attention to that Spirit moving within; we are never allowed to blame or scapegoat others. Spiritual people are called to live by an authority that generates life, inspires life, celebrates life. That's true authority.

And in this time, we are beginning from the place where our hearts are breaking. Our hearts break all the time, and our culture usually says that's a bad thing. But our hearts are broken these days from COVID, eco disasters, racial crises, the inability to speak truth.

And these not only grieve God, they grieve us, they break our hearts. But grieving is a new way to break our hearts *open*, to discover the resources we need for healing. Tears often water the path, so that gradually we can see in new ways. The tears cleanse our eyes just as the rains of this week have saturated the earth, in darkness, overcast, weighing us down, but that is what will give life, new life to us in the springtime.

This homily and the Retreat itself will lead us toward wisdom, and the healing of the Beloved Community, with all of God's people and family on earth. This Retreat is a way of compassion that wants to break our hearts open to seeing ourselves and humanity in ways that we have never seen each other before.

We start, we start here the end of January, by acknowledging we don't know where we are. We have never been here before. We don't know, and we're not going to pretend that we know where we are and what to do. We allow that grief is essential. We acknowledge our problems are not merely political, or fixable. That our struggles are spiritual because we have lost a sense of ourselves. We've lost a sense of each other. We have lost a sense for being in relationship. I have said before what we have mastered in our time is cutting deals with each other. *'Don't ask me to care; don't ask me to be in relationship where we can change and evolve and hurt each other, and also encourage.'*

So we're grieving. Grief is where we begin. This Book of Lamentations, our scripture text for today, is sharing the stories of pain and anguish and loss that so

many people experienced when the Babylonian captivity began. As the passage says,

'How lonely sits the city that once was full of people.'

Doesn't that sound like Washington, DC today? Razor wire everywhere--securest place in the planet, but no people, no culture, no laughter. There is a deep longing in this singular verse and an ache in that passage, not only from what we have been, but what we have become.

Back in 1973, Bev and I lived and worked for a summer on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. This had been the land territory of the Oglala Sioux. Black Elk was an elder, shaman, healer, who lived in that region of Nebraska approximately three generations ago. A book about conversations with Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*, has recently been republished.

Black Elk said, "To cry for a vision is to lament. In the old days, men and women, we begged for the vision all the time. To lament is to prepare; it is to make way; it is to give room for the Great Spirit to speak so that we can realize once again our oneness."

As Black Elk prayed, "Great Spirit, I am sending out my cry so that my people might live. All that I have is a voice so I cry to the Great Spirit that our people might live."

There are two kinds of cries: the sufferings of others which fall on deaf ears--the cries of people of color who say you don't understand, the cries of children separated from their parents on the border, the cries of prisoners and political prisoners, and so many, many more.

And the second kind of cries are the silent cries of our own hearts where we feel dismissed, trivialized, feel as though we don't matter. It is time to merge both the brokenness of our hearts, and the brokenness of others' hearts.

The Retreat we offer and this homily want to be a means to bring together all of us for the healing and hope that is needed to renew the Beloved Community of God, for which we all long, and for which God dreams.

It seems that every culture and religion has a singular word, *pneuma* in Greek, *ruach* in Hebrew, *prana* in Sanskrit, *chi* (as in chi kung) among the Chinese. Every culture has a singular word, which means three things: wind, breath, and, spirit. One word--wind, breath, spirit on them.??

I hope this homily encourages all of us to begin breathing again, to feel the breeze of change and hope in our broken and grieving hearts. And, that we will again welcome the healing of the spirit.

May Jesus the ec-centric one, the outsider, liberate our hearts to hear the cries and the gifts of those who have been muted, and to hear the cries of our own hearts, that he may offer within us genuine life, love, truth, and joy.

As Black Elk said, "Behold a sacred voice is calling you all over the sky; a sacred voice is calling you."

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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Today we pray for all who are invisible, who feel they are nothing.

We pray for those who have been dismissed, who do not count, who are God's sons and daughters, and without them the Beloved Community cannot be complete.

We pray for those taken down by COVID, for their families.

We pray for all who attend to them, for medical researchers, and a blessed distribution of the vaccine.

We pray for those who are essential, who cannot stay home and shelter-in-place, upon whom our society depends and who often are overlooked.

We pray for earth and its renewal, for a breaking out of the Spirit to face the crisis of our times, that our children and grandchildren may live freely in a thriving, blessed earth community.

We pray for that peace, which the world cannot give.
Speak your authority word than our hearts of. ???
that we may attend to the priorities of our times.

Bless all whom we love,
and bless all whom we don't love. we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord light shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.