

Reflection for the Second Sunday of Advent, Dec. 4, 2016

Today, we encounter John the Baptist who has withdrawn to the desert as a nonviolent way of refusing to collaborate with the oppressive Roman Occupation. People seek him out. They see something in him and want the baptism he offers. And what does he do? He says there is One coming after me who is greater. It is His Baptism that you really want. He points the way to Jesus, the Promised One, who will show us what God's dream for the world looks like and demonstrate what being a part of that dream entails.

John the Baptist seemed to point me towards the first and second readings, and to have me ask, "What's my dream for the world? What would it look like?"

Would it look like the beautiful pastoral scene imaged in the first reading?

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.

The cow and the bear shall be neighbors,
together their young shall rest;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.

The baby shall play by the cobra's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.

What a beautiful scene and what a challenge! There are so many unlikely comings together. God's dream as we see it here and as we see it throughout the life of Jesus seems to do that all the time! It can be quite disconcerting. Surely such unlikely comings together are not what God wants of us!

Would God's dream for the world look like Paul's prayer in the second reading? "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this translation from the New American Bible, what caught my attention was, "To think in harmony with one another."

What does that mean? What would that look like?

I remembered that when I was a child, I loved the organ music at church. I would listen not only for the melody, but also for the harmony. It was a joy and a challenge to notice it. Later on, I would recall this and realize that harmony does not mean sameness. It requires a variety of notes which blend together into a beautiful new whole. As I pondered some more, I remembered a few years ago when I had an infection and lost my hearing almost completely for two weeks. Then, on a Sunday morning I was at St. Basil's church with my sister, and to my joy I was beginning to hear again. Yet, since the infection was only beginning to clear, what the organist played and what I heard were very different. The organist whom I knew to be excellent started to play and it sounded tinny to me and discordant! That led me to wonder how often in conversation the way I hear what is said and what the person means, what is actually spoken are different! How often do I listen from the heart with real attention, from the place of communion? How often am I ready to think in harmony with others? How often am I not!

Recently my attention was drawn to a book by John Philip Newell. It is entitled A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth and the Human Soul. In it the author "calls us to a vision of life's essential oneness.... [He invites us] to be a part of a new harmony. [He articulates] a vision and a pathway toward transformation in our lives and world. Newell explores the ancient harmony that is deep in the matter of the

universe, the essential interconnectedness of all things.... With keen insight and sensitivity, he confronts the brokenness of our harmony, as individuals and families and as nations and species. [His message is that] only by knowing and naming the extent and depth of our disharmony will we find the way forward.... He challenges us to consider the possibilities of a new harmony in our lives – as individuals, as communities, and as nations – by asking “What is the cost, both personal and collective of releasing life’s essential oneness in radically new and transformative ways?”¹ And to find an answer, we need only go to the life, and yes, the death of Jesus. And we know what happened to John the Baptist, too!

In a conversation with a friend a couple of weeks ago, I was reminded that harmony is not something we achieve, but, that as we strive for it, we have moments of grace when we experience harmony at least for a time. Perhaps that is what the images in the first reading are portraying – moments of grace. We are invited to relish such moments, remember them and realize that if they happen once, they can happen again.

And then we are called to continue our efforts so that we might experience such moments more often and sooner.

I think we are being offered at least a potential moment of grace in our country right now. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has helped us to know, and in large part, to name the extent and depth of the disharmony between indigenous peoples and settlers here on Turtle Island. We are being challenged to consider the possibility of a new harmony among us. We are realizing that we can only move

¹Inside Flap of *A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth and the Human Soul*, John Philip Newell
Published by Jossey- Bass
A Wiley Imprint
989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741
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forward towards God's dream for our part of the world if we do it together – Indigenous peoples and Settlers. Efforts have been made at St. Joe's before; we see the reminder every Sunday in the Dream Catcher in the sanctuary. We have experienced moments of grace such as the time we had the beautiful Stations of the Cross painted by Ovid Bighetty, an indigenous artist from Manitoba, mounted all around us. I remember in particular being very moved, and sensing that in others, during our Good Friday evening prayer with the Stations as our focus. And now we continue as we have the opportunity to be part of a larger movement towards healing and reconciliation nationwide. Think of the way many of us were touched last Sunday at our 160th Anniversary Mass as an Algonquin woman elder shared her prayer with us. May we listen and speak from our depths as we, parishioners, members of Kateri Native Ministry and all who join with us, gather periodically so as to learn to 'think in harmony with one another'. Who knows what our next moment of grace will look like!

So, God's Dream for the world and ours – May they grow into one great dream. May we be open to the moments of grace which will surely come as we move in that direction!

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