

Privileged to Worship the God of Love

Acts 16:9-15, Revelation 21:10,22-22:3, John 14:23-29, Psalm 67

One of Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry's 'Way of Love' practices for a Jesus-Centered Life is "Worship." We at St. Benedict's, myself included, are very privileged to have this time together each week to worship God in the beauty of Holiness and to be nourished by God's Holy Spirit.

And speaking of privilege, I must say, it is a privilege to be privileged. As a white-male, I am considered by most, if not all non-white races to be just that-privileged. But, I have been privileged in many ways in addition to being white. I was fortunate to have parents who were successful enough to provide well for me and who loved me more than I could have ever expected. Part of that provision and love involved introducing me to the Episcopal Church at an early age. On the other hand, being white doesn't always mean you are privileged. I have seen a lot of white people who were not as privileged as I nor had the kind of fortunate history I've been lucky enough to profess.

In 2011, Susan and I were led to dissolve part of our retirement income in order to be able to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This pilgrimage involved a tour of such locations as Jerusalem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jericho, Bethlehem, Capernaum, the Dead Sea and others. I particularly remember the poverty I witnessed in both Bethlehem and Jericho. I remember how I was filled with compassion for the children, wishing I could take them back to America and buy them a Happy Meal at McDonalds. This was my first real "eye-opener" to what real poverty looks like, I had witnessed people who were poor or less fortunate than me before, but not to this degree.

Even when I worked in Southern California back in the Nineteen Eighties and would have occasion to go into downtown Los Angeles I did not see poverty to this extent; that is, until Susan and I recently had occasion to be in downtown Los Angeles in order to take the train from Union Station to New Mexico to be part of a conference led by theologian, Richard Rohr. As we were touring that part of the city surrounding Union Station we were hit right between the eyes with the extreme poverty that exists there today. Homeless encampments that extend block after block for at least a square mile right in the midst of the urban setting sadly include children, the elderly and the disabled.

These, then, are they who are at the opposite end of the spectrum-the antithesis of privileged-not privileged-marginalized-poor. When I encounter this sharp contrast-this inequity of living standard compared to my own I am, as I am sure you would be too, filled with compassion, and sorrow for not being able to fix it. This feeling of compassion and sorrow that we all feel, I believe, is the Holy Spirit coming to us, and making Her home in us and calling us into action toward change for justice. As we hear today in the gospel according to John, we love Jesus by keeping His word; and, His word is Love, which comes from His Father. By keeping the word of Jesus that comes from God we will be called and inspired to work toward change for those less

privileged than ourselves. By keeping the word of Jesus, we will find ways to do what we can to love the less privileged and, in so doing, make our home with them as Jesus and His Father then make their home in us; and, Jesus will give us His peace unlike the world can give.

In today's gospel according to John Jesus tells the disciples "I am going away, and I am coming to you." Jesus comes to us in those poor, less privileged sheep of His who are our sisters and brothers, who Jesus loves as much as us, and because we love His word and worship His word, we are called by His word to love them and in so doing love Him and God. And we have been empowered to do this as Jesus reminds the disciples, "The Holy Spirit will teach you everything...Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." In our corporate worship together each week we adhere to Presiding Bishop Curry's 'Way of Love' practice when we consume the Holy Spirit of our Savior in the Eucharist filling us with everything we need to take the leap of love in faith.

Our point in count homeless population here in Los Osos is approximately thirty, including those living in their vehicles. Our mission is minor in scope compared to a parish in metropolitan Los Angeles, but it is a mission, nonetheless. And, I feel we here at St. Benedict's do it quite well and I applaud us for that. But, as with anything done well, there is always the question, can it be done better?

I see us being quite accomplished at welcoming 'the other' into our midst. We show significant compassion in our sacrifices of time and energies to shelter the un-housed during in climate weather-do our part to feed those without sufficient resources and provide laundry service to those in need of it. We are doing our part to advocate and raise money for the construction of a shower at the South Bay Community Center, and to implement a Safe Parking program for those confined to living in their vehicles. We have demonstrated our compassion and love for 'the other'; but, perhaps, we could do a little better at making them feel welcome enough to call St. Benedict's "home"-St. Benedict's "family."

This would perhaps involve a somewhat 'radical welcoming' idea which includes them as integral members of the design and implementation of the ministries of this church allowing them an equal hand in being part of a ministry which could make that ministry even more attractive and successful. This is just one idea of an angle we could look at in expanding the way we do ministry- a way of stepping outside the box, so to speak.

I believe we at St. Benedict's have the potential to explore and pioneer new approaches to ministry by sitting together in prayer and contemplation followed up with discussions about the gifts and resources we discover that we have to launch new and innovative methods to enhance our already effective ministries.

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, our privilege extends well beyond what the world can give. Our privilege is in loving Jesus and following Bishop Curry's 'Way of Love' practice in our worship of praise and thanksgiving and consumption of Christ's Holy Spirit in the Eucharist,

empowering us to go out to Him in the margins of the less privileged where we will find both He and God at home with us as we bring God's love to 'the other,' - some of whom have been deeply scarred, physically, mentally and spiritually by the horror of war-and by doing this, I believe, we will surely discover that there is where our real privilege and treasure are to be found and where our hearts will be also.

Let us take a couple of moments in silence to remember all the fallen heroes we remember and honor this Memorial Day weekend, May they rest in peace and RISE in Christ's eternal glory

Amen.