

Homily for CCA Meeting

Acts 13, 26-33;

To us this word of salvation has been sent. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and their leaders failed to recognize him, and by condemning him they fulfilled the oracles of the prophets that are read Sabbath after Sabbath. For even though they found no grounds for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him put to death, and when they had accomplished all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him to Jerusalem. These are now his witnesses before the people. We ourselves announce to you this good news that what God promised our ancestors he has brought to fulfillment for us their children, by raising up Jesus, as it is written in the second psalm, "You are my son, this day I have begotten you."

John 14, 1-6

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way. Thomas said to him, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. /7/If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and you have seen him."

I could hardly believe this passage from John's last discourse would be the daily reading for today as we close our meeting by celebrating a liturgy honoring Our Holy Mother St Teresa.

Many dwelling places! I am the Way. No one comes to the Father but through me. How Teresian can we get! Our Holy Mother's entire life and teaching here. I have been immersed in and enthralled by the sixth and seventh dwelling places during the fifth centenary year so there is nothing I would rather reflect upon than dwelling places.

I want to mention several pertinent points of interpretation about the scripture passage because they help us to see how Teresa lived into this text. Her identity was so radically transformed by her relationship with Jesus Christ, so imbedded in his identity that she testifies to us from the depths of Trinitarian life about many dwelling places.

The Greek word we translate dwelling places really means a permanent dwelling place, better still, a permanent abiding. The verb has been used earlier in the Gospel with the sense of the presence or the rejection of an intimate reciprocity. This enduring dwelling place or permanent abiding will reappear big time in the next chapter of John as the leitmotif (15, 1-11): *I am the Vine, you are the branches, abide in me and I in you, abide in my love*. Here Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you...*I will take you to myself so that where I am you also may be*.

The adverb “where” has a thematic importance in John’s Gospel. The first question addressed to Jesus is, “*Rabbi, where do you abide?*” and here in the last discourse where Jesus is going becomes central. (Thomas: we do not know where...) We know the “where” of Jesus in John’s Gospel is not primarily spatial or geographical location. Rather it indicates indwelling, permanent abiding, the communion between Jesus and Abba God and between Jesus and his disciples. Where Jesus is, is in the bosom of the Father. *No one comes to the Father except through me. I am the Way. If you know me, you know the Father.*

But remember earlier Jesus says, *no one can come to **me** except drawn by **the Father** who sent me*; now he “says, *no one comes to **the Father** except through **me***. It seems the evangelist employs a paradox or seeming contradiction to help us realize that this permanent abiding (indwelling) cannot take place unless we are shaken loose from the convictions, the “truths,” the prejudices, the commonsense assumptions that constitute our everyday “knowledge” and our individual self - our present stage of development. Intimacy with Jesus progressively destabilizes, subverts and undermines what we know and who we are so that we become vulnerable, open to the “unheard of” that comes to us in Jesus. (SS, 32)

It is in the sixth dwelling places particularly that Teresa’s individual self, her sense of self, is decisively subverted and the familiar boundaries of her soul profoundly stretched in and through her embodied prayer experiences. She makes clear that it is the imaginative and intellectual visions of Christ which brought about her entrance into the 7th dwelling places.

Her numerous visions and other experiences of embodied prayer – raptures, ecstasies, locutions - in the 6th dwelling places are the Way through which the transformed humanity of Jesus, rooted totally in his divine relationship with Abba, brought her into the spiritual marriage. It is important to note that while Teresa had passing experiences of the Trinity in the 6th mansions, it is an imaginative vision of Christ that sealed the Spiritual Marriage.

Teresa shows us the difference between becoming more and more conscious of Christ and of becoming conscious with Christ's own consciousness. Her relational identity deepened and expanded to the extent that she was so totally identified with Jesus Christ, so divinized and humanized by union with the divine and human Christ, that she was drawn into the mutual, dynamic relationships, the interflow of life and love, the communion, that constitute the Triune life - sharing explicitly in Christ's relationships. Teresa is explicitly conscious of the Father with Jesus Christ's consciousness and is bonded to the Father by the Holy Spirit and this becomes a permanent abiding in the 7th dwelling places. (John+: "The Father speaks one Word and in silence it is heard by the soul...")

It is the explicitness of Teresa's identification with Christ, the explicitness with which Teresa knows Abba as Christ knows Abba, that I find absolutely astounding. Of course, this is nothing new. It is the heart of our charism. But it calls to us! It echoes deep within our souls. Oh, to have such explicit consciousness of this permanent abiding before our lives on earth end.

I am captivated, stunned, by Teresa's testimony that it was through her imaginative and intellectual visions of Christ, her embodied prayer experiences, that she grew into such a permanent abiding. These were not curious singularities or superfluous epiphenomena in Teresa's development but the touch of the living Christ giving Teresa a partial and anticipatory participation in the resurrected body that is our own full future. We know well as Carmelites that Teresa assures us such embodied experiences are not necessary for union with God – and we hold on to this; we value it with a certain unpretentious appreciation of the ordinary life of everyday love - but these embodied experiences were crucial, decisive, for the profound transformation of Teresa's consciousness.

How decisive are they for us now as we – all of us - face the fears and the hopes we have for the future of our charism? What do they mean for us?

Is it exaggerated to see among us a communal experience of the 6th dwelling place where the boundaries of our collective soul are being stretched? Where our autonomous identities are being subverted? Where we are being shaken loose from long held prejudices and assumptions? We come from a long tradition of strong, faithful Teresian women. Cumulatively among us, we have lived and grown in the intimate dwelling places of Carmelite prayer. Is it so strange that we should stand now with such vulnerability on the brink of a new time, a new dwelling place?

Perhaps, on one level, the embodied Christic experiences that pull us out of ourselves today and tear open our souls are the many people - women, children – brutalized by war and unspeakable violence, the thousands upon thousands of migrants and refugees driven from their homes and countries by bombing, terrorism, genocide and starvation, the poor in our own cities, the “other”...

Perhaps, importantly for us today, embodied visions of Christ are given to us here, now, in one another, in the eyes and the faces of one another, in the intimacies and hopes we share. (When I looked into Teresa Benedicta’s eyes and asked the same question five times during this meeting, I experienced this.) These Christic visions and locutions are the doorway to a new dwelling place, a permanent abiding in the dynamic communion of Trinitarian love, a new communal relational identity marked by an unbreakable interconnectedness and communion among ourselves and with all our people. (with our earth and the infinite reaches of our cosmos). This is the Carmel, the charism, I dream of. This is the Carmel that with a transformed communal consciousness will influence the emergence of humanity to a new stage of consciousness and communion. I trust our new leadership will be attentive to this dream.