

FRANCISCAN JOURNEY Additional Readings – Chapter 19

Christianity & Social Progress (*Mater et Magistra*) – Saint Pope John XXIII – Paragraph 257

257. To search for spiritual perfection and eternal salvation in the conduct of human affairs and institutions is not to rob these of the power to achieve their immediate, specific ends, but to enhance this power.

The words of our divine Master are true for all time: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice; and all these things shall be added unto you." (*Mt 6:33*) The man who is "light in the Lord" (*Eph 5:8*) and who walks as a "child of the light" (cf. *ibid*) has a sure grasp of the fundamental demands of justice in all life's difficulties and complexities, obscured though they may be by so much individual, national and racial selfishness.

Animated, too, by the charity of Christ, he finds it impossible not to love his fellow men. He makes his own their needs, their sufferings and their joys. There is a sureness of touch in all his activity in every field. It is energetic, generous and considerate. For "charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." (*1 Cor 13:4-7*)

Conclusions – *Engaged Spirituality* – Joseph Nangle, OFM – pp. 15-17

We began to think about all these things when our parish team took on the sister-nurse's dilemma that night in Lima. The process of unpacking her crucial question about God's presence in the desperate lives of the impoverished people there went on for a long time – years really – and, at least for me, continues as a work in progress. I'm sure that coming to understand what the incarnation of God means in the light of human suffering and degradation takes a lifetime. But two further and surprising conclusions came to us back then and serve as fitting conclusions to this chapter.

First, we came to one further "answer" to the question the sister posed about where evidence of God exists in the lives of the sick and poor among us. It's in us. If believing in God's incarnation sheds light on that question, further clarity comes when we realize that it is we ourselves who are the evidence today of God's providence – or, we're not. Back then we came to the challenging insight that the whole purpose of the incarnation – of God-with-us – has become the task of all the people who believe in it and act on it, whether explicitly or implicitly. Jesus has left the scene. It's now just us, left, as the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer puts it, to "complete His work on earth." Put negatively, if we are not vitally concerned about the worth of each person, the consequences of each relationship, and the effects of each structure, then to that extent the Incarnate Jesus is absent today.

We saw that people who reach out to other people, especially to those in most need; people who try to make even difficult relationships work; people who beat their head and fists against the walls of unjust social systems – these are the hands and feet and smile, the healing action, and yes, the saving death of Jesus today. Jesus said all of this quite simply when he prayed: "[Father,] I do not ask you to take them out of the world....As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (*Jn 17:15, 18*).

A second "answer" to where evidence of God is in human suffering came to us thanks to the poor themselves. We began to look at them in a new way, noticing that they identified with an incarnate God who also suffered – especially on the cross. We saw that they took a great deal of consolation from that aspect of his life. They related to the suffering God of Good Friday much better than to the triumphant God of Easter Sunday. The crucifixion came much closer to their experience than the resurrection.

In fact, we began to see that for us, the non-poor, just the opposite was true. We related more to Easter than to Good Friday. Since then, I've noticed that very often Christians in the United States begin to wish each other a happy Easter right after the Palm Sunday ceremonies, or surely when the Holy Thursday liturgy has finished. We seem to skip over Good Friday, perhaps because, unlike the poor, our society has rarely had the sort of searing experiences of suffering that they have on a daily basis. This is really an ominous situation for people of faith in the heart of the empire.

And so, our question back in Lima – Where is the evidence of a loving God in the lives of the sick and poor? – had further light shed on it thanks to the example of those same poor and often miserable human beings. They knew a God who shared their pain in the life, especially in the sufferings and death of Jesus. They became truly our teachers. They showed us the way to a realistic spirituality based on what the church there was calling for: a preferential option for the poor. Thanks to those desperately poor, marginalized, oppressed women and men, we came to understand a little better what Jesus the Christ, the incarnation of a loving God, means when, surprisingly, he says to us “as often as you did it – or not – for one of these, the least of my sisters or brothers you did it – or not – for me” (*Mt 25:40*)

Can we even begin to hope that the same conversion will happen in our country? The poor still have to ability to teach us, to hold out the possibility that we Americans of faith and those of good will can change the course of our history, even now, and begin to serve the impoverished peoples of our nation and the world rather than go on exploiting them. If there is any hope for this empire, I believe it's with people of faith and good will here who “have the eyes to see,” who understand the full dimensions of God's incarnation and who act on that understanding.

Saved in Hope (*Spe Salvi*) – Pope Benedict XVI – Paragraph 26

It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of “redemption” which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him say: “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom 8:38-39*). If this absolute love exists, with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man “redeemed”, whatever should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means to say: Jesus Christ has “redeemed” us. Through him we have become certain of God, a God who is not a remote “first cause” of the world, because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can say: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (*Gal 2:20*).

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html

Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me round among them; and behold, there were very many upon the valley; and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Again he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And as I looked, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no spirit in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the spirit, prophesy, son of man, and say to the spirit, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O spirit, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the spirit came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host.

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD.”

The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Eze 37:1–14). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.