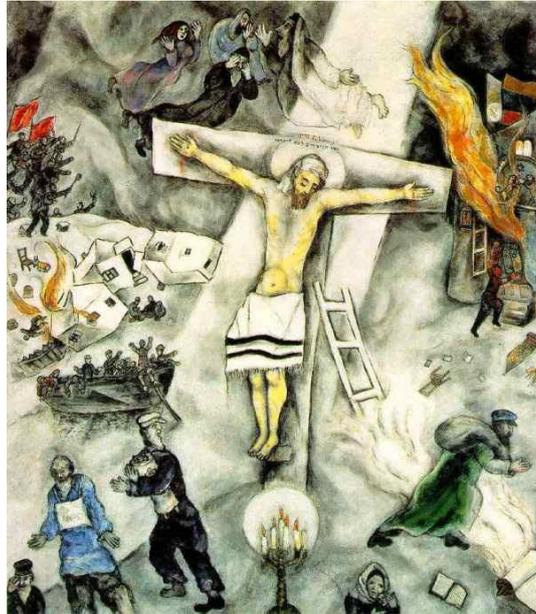




Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, September 30th, 2018

O Saving Victim! Crucifying our own Narcissism



Contemporary understandings of the world in which we live and the problems we confront, tend to be fairly shallow. We seem at a loss to understand our world with any real coherent insight, as we thrash around, the victims of simplistic explanations and ideologies which we know are inadequate, but which appear to be the only ones on offer. To our modern malaise, the cross is one tool that has the potential to help us dig deeper, that awakens us to and helps us interpret the world in which we live.

In the Christian tradition, there are numerous ways of interpreting the cross. The first, is that which wakes us up to God's nature, to the love of God in our lives. The classic explanation of the cross is one that eloquently of *God for us*. It is *the* source of hope for the world, even if it is not recognized as such. The second interpretation, of the cross, we referred to last Sunday- is one that speaks of the cross as that which wakes us up to reality: that human and historical reality is in large part made up of victims and victimisers, or as the Spanish world would have it, victims and hangmen. Here, God is the crucified victim, imploring us to work to ensure that there are no more victims. The cross appeals to us to bring those who are crucified by injustice down from their crosses.

Today, we turn to yet another interpretation of the cross. This time, we focus upon the cross as that power which invites us to think critically about ourselves, to identify those narcissistic traits within us, within the groups with which we identify, and within the society of which we are a part, that generate victims in the first place. The cross of the victim God, asks us to dig deeper, to crucify those elements with *us* and within our communities that kill.

Again, we maintain the image of Marc Chagall's "White Crucifixion" - in which Chagall begs us to think deeply about who we are in modern times.

GATHERING

Announcements

Welcome

In the name of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you

And with you

Hymn: Sing a New Song (TiS 166, Cosmic Praise, James Phillip McAuley)

Introduction to the Theme

Today we focus upon the idea of the cross, as means, as a power to help us think more deeply about ourselves and our world: in particular to reflect critically upon those 'narcissistic' traits which we seldom identify. In our readings, from both Numbers and Mark, we find a challenge to the oft-exclusivist understanding we have of ourselves and the groups of which we are a part. In Numbers, we hear that wisdom is something that is shared in the Hebrew community, not a possession of any one person. In Mark's Gospel we hear Jesus' warning against exclusivist behaviours of the disciples, accruing to their particular group, all knowledge and power.

Community Prayers

In this simple prayer, grounded in the Gospel reading for today, we focus on the way in which the disciples, assume all wisdom to themselves. They are anxious to ensure that they alone are the vehicles of God's renewal of the world. It is in their self-serving philosophy and theology that they undo all that they could do. Claiming altogether too much for themselves, they deform what could be.

Dividing the world
according to our judgements,
into us and them.

They watched him cast out
demons. Not part of their group!
They tried to stop him.

Jesus said, Let be!
Who does such things in my name
cannot malign me.

Someone not opposed
to the things I do or say
must be on our side.

Our Confession and Reconciliation

Let us be still and listen to the voice of God

Silence

O God,
enable us to see beyond ourselves.

O God,
enable us to think beyond ourselves

O God enable us to live beyond ourselves

Crucify our narcissism – both individual and collective –
that kills, that generates victims

O God, forgive us!
Help us to see be moved by your self-giving, your self-yielding
Amen

The Peace

Peace be with you;
and also with you

The young people leave for SMG

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Anecdotal Thoughts about the Cross as a Vehicle to Think Deeply about Reality and Ourselves

The cross is not a noun. The cross is about crucifixion. The cross is about what people do to each other. It is about death actively or passively imposed. It means that there are victims and there are hangmen. It means that there exists today, as much as yesterday, a grave sin committed by individuals and society.

Jon Sobrino, “The Crucified People – Suffering Servant of God”

Only the forgiven understand that they are sinners.

Karl Rahner

What is so fundamental to Christian consciousness is the sharp awareness of the human capacity for lies, for self-deception, both at the level of the individual and society.

José Ignacio González Faus, “Spiritual Experience of the Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola”

Readings

Numbers 11:4-29 (Good News Translation)

Elizabeth White

It is customary among interpreters to view the people’s complaint against Moses’ leadership as whiny and self-obsessed. God and Moses have provided for them, the argument goes, and they should be grateful. After all, what the people seem to have forgotten is that the cost of those leeks and onions was their very enslavement at the hands of Pharaoh, from which God and Moses had dramatically rescued them. God and Moses seem to take just such a view, the Lord seething with anger while Moses wishes to die rather than put up with their petulance. Yet, a different reading of the text is possible. When Moses complains to God about the burden of leading the people, God’s response is to propose a restructuring of leadership. From now on the people will have a voice in the decisions that affect the community. This suggests that the people’s complaint has been less a selfish grumbling than a symptom of poor leadership exercised by Moses.

⁴ There were foreigners traveling with the Israelites. They had a strong craving for meat, and even the Israelites themselves began to complain: “If only we could have some meat! ⁵ In Egypt we used to eat all the fish we wanted, and it cost us nothing. Remember the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic we had? ⁶ But now our strength is gone. There is nothing at all to eat—nothing but this manna day after day!”

¹⁰ Moses heard all the people complaining as they stood around in groups at the entrances of their tents. He was distressed because the LORD had become angry with them, ¹¹ and he said to the LORD, “Why have you treated me so badly? Why are you displeased with me? Why have you given me the responsibility for all these people? ¹² I didn't create them or bring them to birth! Why should you ask me to act like a nurse and carry them in my arms like babies all the way to the land you promised to their ancestors? ¹³ Where could I get enough meat for all these people? They keep whining and asking for meat. ¹⁴ I can't be responsible for all these people by myself; it's too much for me! ¹⁵ If you are going to treat me like this, have pity on me and kill me, so that I won't have to endure your cruelty any longer.”

¹⁶ The LORD said to Moses, “Assemble seventy respected men who are recognized as leaders of the people, bring them to me at the Tent of my presence, and tell them to stand there beside you.

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He assembled seventy of the leaders and placed them around the Tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the spirit he had given to Moses and gave it to the seventy leaders. When the spirit came on them, they began to shout like prophets, but not for long.

²⁸ Then Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' helper since he was a young man, spoke up and said to Moses, “Stop them, sir!”

²⁹ Moses answered, “Are you concerned about my interests? I wish that the LORD would give his spirit to all his people and make all of them shout like prophets!”

Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Mark 9:38-50 (Good News Translation)

Stephen White

Just as the Hebrew reading reflects upon the need for inclusive leadership, so does the Gospel for today. The question in the story sounds like a copyright issue, a demarcation dispute. It was very reasonable: how could we have Jesus' name being used like this without any control? It is quite extraordinary that what seemed very reasonable does not win Jesus' support. The point here is that as long as people are being liberated from what oppresses them, that is what matters, not the issue of who does it. Jesus is not obsessed with protecting his reputation, but someone who cares

about people. It does not matter if the love comes from his hand or the hand of another, as long as it comes.

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw a man who was driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn't belong to our group.”

³⁹ “Do not try to stop him,” Jesus told them, “because no one who performs a miracle in my name will be able soon afterward to say evil things about me. ⁴⁰ For whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ I assure you that anyone who gives you a drink of water because you belong to me will certainly receive a reward.

⁴² “If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose faith in me, it would be better for that person to have a large millstone tied around the neck and be thrown into the sea. ⁴³ So if your hand makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out. ⁴⁴ [a]⁴⁵ And if your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶ [b] ⁴⁷ And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁸ There ‘the worms that eat them never die, and the fire that burns them is never put out.’

⁴⁹ “Everyone will be purified by fire as a sacrifice is purified by salt.

⁵⁰ “Salt is good; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? “Have the salt of friendship among yourselves, and live in peace with one another.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

A Film Clip: Call the Midwife (Series 4, Episode 2)

In this brief clip we experience the conflict between the new senior midwife, Phyllis Crane and Sister Evangelina. Sister Evangelina is the ‘gate-keeper’ who is confronted by a woman who is equally competent and possibly even more self-confident and dogmatic. Each woman exposes the insecurity and anxiety of the other.

Hymn: Blessed Assurance

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
 O what a foretaste of glory divine!
 Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
 Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

*This is my story, this is my song,
 praising my Savior all the day long;
 this is my story, this is my song,
 praising my Savior all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight!
 Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
 Angels descending bring from above
 Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

(Refrain)

Perfect submission, all is at rest!
 I in my Savior am happy and blessed,
 Watching and waiting, looking above,
 Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

(Refrain)

Some Thoughts

Let's Give

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
 praise him, all creatures here below,
 praise him above, ye heavenly host,
 praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Prayers of the People

Annette Burne

The one who prays ends each petition with the words, ***“help us to live the kingdom,*** and the congregational response, is to be sung according to Robin Mann’s ‘Sorrowing Song, TiS 689, according to the four verses. We end with the Lord’s Prayer.

Lord's Prayer

Let us say the Lord's Prayer
***Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done,
 on earth as in heaven.
 Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
 as we forgive those who sin against us.
 Save us from the time of trial
 and deliver us from evil.***

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
 now and forever. Amen.***

하늘에 계신 우리 아버지여
 이름이 거룩히 여김을 받으시오며
 나라이 임하옵시며
 뜻이 하늘에서 이룬 것 같이
 땅에서도 이루어지이다.
 오늘날 우리에게 일용할 양식을 주옵시고
 우리가 우리에게
 죄 지은 자를 사하여 준 것 같이
 우리 죄를 사하여 주옵시고
 우리를 시험에 들게 하지 마옵시고
 다만 악에서 구하옵소서
 대개 나라와 권세와 영광이
 아버지께 영원히 있사옵나이다. 아멘

Closing Hymn: We are Called (As One Voice, Vol II, 60, David Haas)

Come! live in the light!
 Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!
 We are called to be light for the kingdom,
 to live in the freedom of the city of God!

Refrain:

*We are called to act with justice.
 We are called to love tenderly.
 We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.*

Come! Open your heart!
 Show your mercy to all those in fear!
 We are called to be hope for the hopeless,
 so all hatred and blindness will be no more!

Refrain

Sing! Sing a new song!
 Sing of that great day when all will be one!
 God will reign and we'll walk with each other as sisters
 and brothers united in love!

Refrain

Blessing and Sending Out

Christ is life!

Let us live
 Walking with the Christ,
 allowing the cross to unmask our own brokenness,
 as we bring people down from *their* crosses.

Our service has ended

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Going Out: Shalom to you now (TiS 778, Somos del Señor, Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)

Musical Postlude

Organist:

Jeanette Steer