

“THE PLACE WHERE WE ARE RIGHT”

Philip Pinto, cfc

Truth-telling, wind-blowing, life-giving Spirit –
 We present ourselves now
 For our instruction and guidance:
 Breathe your truth among us,
 Breathe your truth of deep Friday loss,
 Your truth of awesome Sunday joy.

Breathe your story of death and life
 That our story may be submitted to your will for life.
 We pray in the name of Jesus risen to new life –
 And him crucified.¹

Dear Sisters, gathered at this holy time of Chapter, in this sacred space of listening, the time is now!

All your efforts at preparation have brought you to this moment. All over the world people are with you in prayer, knowing that what happens in this place will bless the lives of countless others. You have only one task: to listen for the voice of the God who has walked beside you from your moment of conception. Now you are invited to set aside personal ambitions and province agendas, ministerial anxieties and community tensions. During these days you will recall elements of your story – because we are people of the story. It is in telling the story once more that we will discern the hidden and silent figure of Mystery.

Can we take a moment or two right now to once again commit ourselves to fresh listening, willing to allow ourselves to be surprised by a face of God hitherto unknown to us?

Let me begin with a verse from the Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai, from whom I have borrowed the title of this talk.

*From the place where we are right
 flowers will never grow
 in the spring.*

*The place where we are right
 is hard and trampled
 like a yard.*

*But doubts and loves
 dig up the world
 like a mole, a plough.
 And a whisper will be heard in the place
 where the ruined
 house once stood.²*

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Prayers for a Privileged People*

² Yehuda Amichai, *The Place Where We Are Right*

Amichai's words remind us that we humans love sureness and certitude; we love being right and not having to question our assumptions and beliefs. And yet, he says, nothing grows in such places because the ground has been trampled into hardness from overuse. We know, of course, that this is an image of our hearts and minds. Our hearts grow hard from lack of questioning and doubt. But allow doubt and questions to come in, and the ground is tilled and ploughed, ready for a new harvest. We are slowly learning that nothing is so sacred that it cannot be questioned!

Chapter time is the time for looking again at our assumptions and beliefs, checking them against the experiences since the previous Chapter and asking ourselves if we are children of the God of Jesus or of an idol of our own making. You and I are old enough to realise that many of the beliefs that we grew up with, are not helpful any longer in an evolving world.

Today we once more hear Jesus inviting us to *"Come apart with me by yourselves and rest awhile"* (Mk. 6:31). The 'rest' is really to take stock once more of our own story and to ponder what God is doing in and through us. Is it a *'new thing'* being done?

We also realise that in coming apart by ourselves, it doesn't mean that we are alone – the crowds still seek us out. We are always surrounded by the people we love, the ones we live with, work with, and who depend on us.

Can we hear the Master say to us, *"Feed them yourselves?"* Our present Pope's words are most relevant at this moment. *"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets....more than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us, 'Give them something to eat'."*

Can we also at this time recognise the multiplication of loaves taking place in our lives? If we can't see that, then we can't see anything. Our minds are closed, as Jesus accused his disciples in Mark's Gospel. (6:52, 8:17-21)

As we reflect on and share the story, let me remind you of one of my favourite Gospel texts: *"I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know the Master's business. No, I call you friends because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father."* (Jn. 15:15)

- What did he share with them? His Kingdom dream and all it implied.
- What have you learned from God over the past six years that you HAVE TO SHARE with your Sisters in the Chapter?

I believe he shared with them his own religious search: his own disconnect between his experience of God and the messages he received from his religious tradition. He shared his indignation and unease about the exploitation and marginalization of his people. He told them about the ridiculous burdens which religious leaders placed on people in the name of God. He shared with them how his own world was being widened, the more he began to understand the love of the One he called Abba. We see in the Gospels moments when he *"called the disciples aside"* and showed them what he had seen. (Luke 10 and Mark 12). He shared with them his frustrations at their own 'blindness' (Mk. 8:17f).

And this brings me to the last part of this reflection. What Jesus really shared with his disciples was his experience of God.

- Every Chapter is an experience of God.
- The difficulty of sharing a Chapter experience.

- Look at the road along which you have travelled and note the milestones.
- What has your Congregation learned about God? (Dt. 8:2ff)
- Israel learned it was a love story. (Hos. 2:16, 11:1-5)
- Every Chapter is another episode in the love story.
- How is God's love unfolding?

Here are three statements/questions that will come up time and again in the next few days:

- If my understanding of God is the same today as it was five years ago, I am in a spiritual rut!
- What have I learned about God that I did not find in a book, and that someone has not told me?
- When was the last time I did something for the first time?

I close with three selections from today's poet-mystics. They place before us reminders of what we are here for.

Now, looking through the slanting light of the morning window
toward the mountain presence of everything that can be
what urgency calls you to your one love?
What shape waits in the seed of you
to grow and spread its branches
against a future sky?³

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?”⁴

“Listen--are you breathing just a little, and calling it a life?”⁵

³ David Whyte, *What to remember when waking*

⁴ Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day*

⁵ Mary Oliver, *Have You Ever Tried to Enter the Long Black Branches?*