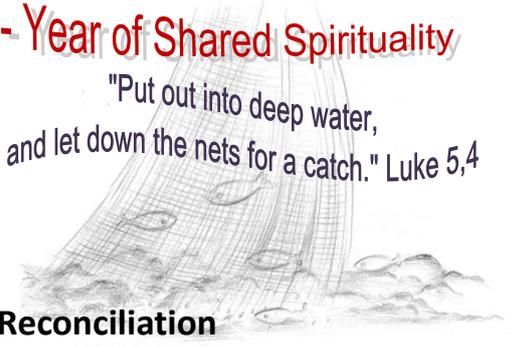




Journey of Enrichment

2011 - Year of Shared Spirituality

"Put out into deep water,
and let down the nets for a catch." Luke 5,4



Forgiveness and Reconciliation

"You are God's chosen race; God loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same." (Col.3:13)

Lived Experience

What moved us deeply in talking to one of our Sisters who worked for 34 years in prison ministry, and accompanied 20 men and women to their death, was the way in which she shared about the meaning of this experience for her. She had journeyed with and struggled for years with individuals as they moved from a sense of being "the wretched of the earth" to being "sinners beloved by God". "What touches me and heals me and them is the tender mercy of God" she said with a sense of amazement and reverence.

Whilst, it is not everyone's privilege to work in this very challenging ministry, all of us in our daily lives in families, in communities, in work situations are called to a mission of reconciliation. This begins from an awareness of our own weakness and our continual need for conversion and transformation. From our own experience of discovering God's mercy we can witness to the gift of God's love and mercy in the lives of others.

SJE's insight

John Eudes was aware of the obstacles that can prevent intimate relationships with God, self, and others. In the third of his four movements of prayer, following openness to God and adoring and giving thanks, we become aware of the distance that exists between our lives as we live them in reality and the marvels of God's love. We feel the need to enter gradually into the forgiveness experience. We need to forgive ourselves for not being the persons we can be; we need to forgive others for being different from us and we need to forgive God for always being a little disconcerting; God's ways are not our ways!¹

John Eudes encourages us to present to the Church and the world the signs of a real and profound reconciliation.²

SME's experience

We know that Mary Euphrasia desired that our communities be special places of reconciliation and generally she "never let the sun go down on her anger" (cf Eph 4:26). When she became conscious of having offended somebody, she would not go to bed without asking them pardon. There are several examples where she forgave people who offended her. One of these was, Sr. Mechtilde Flosse, who had been superior of the convent in Clermont, and had given her much grief. She left the congregation in 1841, shortly after the closing of that convent. Six years later she wrote to Mary Euphrasia full of remorse for her behaviour and begged to be readmitted to the Congregation. Mary Euphrasia was quick to reply: "Heaven pardons you and my heart receives

¹ Spiritual Itinerary for Today with St. John Eudes

² Bulletin of the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of SJE

you, my dear daughter; and knowing your heart, I do not wish to make you buy the happiness of returning to the fold. Also, I am leaving it to grace to help you make the reparation you think necessary... Here you will find God, peace and happiness. Not a single reproach will be made to you.”³

A Resurrection Perspective

St. Mary Magdalen, who was the first to proclaim the resurrection, can open up new perspectives for us on the liberating power of God’s merciful love. Following the stress and confusion which she and the other women experienced after the Crucifixion, she gives us hope that through God’s unconditional love, all of us in need of reconciliation can return to God. “An understanding of the spirituality of the resurrection facilitates an appreciation of the spirituality of reconciliation”.⁴

Take responsibility and Act for Justice

Our focus on forgiveness is an essential part of spiritual growth, but, should not emphasise shame or scrupulosity or fear. Nevertheless, when we focus on God’s extraordinary beauty and the ways in which we disfigure the world, erect barriers among ourselves and are less human than we are called to be, we come to recognize our need for forgiveness. We come to realize that we need to take responsibility for relationships with God, others and creation.

God’s love experienced as forgiveness moves us in the direction of offering resistance to the sinfulness of the world. Action on behalf of justice and peace is an important consequence that flows from God’s love and the human need for forgiveness.

Agents of God’s Activity

Reconciliation is first and foremost the work of God. Only God has the perspective that can sort everything out. We are but the agents of God’s activity: “*Ambassadors for Christ’s sake*” (2 Cor 5: 20). In order to be faithful and fruitful mediators of reconciliation, we must be in constant contact and communion with God.

We do not initiate the activity, but learn to wait in silence and patience for God to speak. We learn to wait and watch with those who are seeking healing. In his book “*Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order*”, Schreiter points to the two disciplines necessary for reconciliation: the practice of contemplative prayer and the creation of safe, hospitable spaces for others. The experience of hospitality can prepare the way for the experience of divine hospitality – the gift we call grace.

Reflection Questions

How can we create hospitable spaces for others at personal, family and community levels?

In what way is the “*Journey of Enrichment*” inviting us to live more authentically in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Pray the Prayer of St. Francis together

³ SME Letter, Nov. 4 1847 to Mademoiselle Flosse, no. 1193, Vol 6

⁴ Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a changing social order*, (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1992) p.78