

Meditation for Holy Thursday 09/04/2020

Earlier this week, I took time to read again Irish poet Brendan Kennelly's version of *The Trojan Women*. The words of the sea god Poseidon in the opening soliloquy keep coming back to me. Poseidon is looking at the devastated city of Troy. He muses, "Freedom is like health. You don't know it until you've lost it."

In these days of global pandemic, some 70,000 have faced the terrible prospect of untimely death, in many cases people with impaired immune systems, people who have already known the loss of health. I think about those in crowded detention and correctional centres, people who stand to lose both the health and the limited freedom they have had. I think of those who lost their homes in the recent bushfires and are now living in makeshift dwellings. Most of us remain well, thank God, but every one of us is facing some loss of a freedom we may previously have taken for granted. I find myself pondering the meaning of freedom and giving thanks for the freedom we have, the freedom we didn't really "know". "Freedom is like health. You don't know it until you've lost it."

Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday is the church's celebration of liberation, of freedom. It marks the most solemn time in the liturgical calendar. The reading from Exodus in today's liturgy is about "Passover", the meal to be celebrated "forever" in memory of God's liberating the Israelites. For the Jews, Passover makes present all the saving power of the originating events of God's freeing of the Israelites from slavery. The celebration of Eucharist likewise makes present all the saving and liberating power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. In Paul's words for today to the little community in Corinth, we have the earliest account of the celebration of the Eucharist. The gospel reading for tonight reminds us that Eucharist only makes sense if we are prepared to wash one another's feet. Eucharist is both meal and sacrifice, a celebration of selfless love. On Good Friday we are invited to re-member the suffering, death and burial of Jesus and to await the culmination of the story. At the Easter Vigil, we have Matthew's account of the women at the tomb, their double commissioning, first by the angel and then by the risen One whom they encounter as they go in joy and haste to proclaim the good news.

But before we hear that gospel, we hear Paul's rhetorical question to the community of believers in Rome: "Do you not know...?" His question leads into an instruction on the meaning of baptism, the meaning of our initiation into Christ Jesus and into living the mystery of liberation from the power of Sin with a capital S that we celebrate at this time. If the community is truly "living to God" as the body of Christ, then membership should mean being part of a healthy, life-giving culture where Sin with a capital S has no sway. Sadly we fall short and need to hear Paul asking that question of us: "Do you not know....? At this time of such loss for so many, may we truly know the freedom of "living to God" and of allowing the liberating power of God to have its way in our world.

-Veronica Lawson rsm