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7.8.17 Homily

14th Ordinary

Zech 9:9-10; Ps 145:1-2,8-11,13-14; Rom 8:9-13; Matt 11:25-30

Elsie Hainz McGrath

Recall that last week we established “the little ones” as the disciples. And remember that the disciples are the prophets; the disciples are the virtuous; the disciples are the imitators of prophets and of those who live virtuously in the midst of this toxic wasteland we have made of our idyllic beginnings in Eden.

This week, the term Jesus uses for those little ones is “the untutored.” Because the more we profess to know through book learning, the less we seem to grasp the commonsense secrets of life and of living.

The profs I worked with most intimately, the theologians at SLU, used to joke that they were absolutely clueless when it came to living in the “real” world outside of academia. And, truth be told, they did rather consistently fail in many commonsense 101 matters. But for the most part, these were women and men who were both prophetic and virtuous. Because they knew their own shortcomings and they were able to relate to those of us who did not share their intellect, or often even their interest in things theological.

Note that Jesus had just been condemning the people of his generation because they failed to be won over despite the evidence of his “mighty deeds.” I’m guessing he was thinking in particular, here, of the leaders and the prominent people of those places he had visited, because he contrasted their “lack of faith” with the “ordinary” folks who were open to the Spirit’s revelation. Maybe Jesus was feeling bummed out, like we all do so often, at the seeming lack of success of his mission. And then it occurred to him that maybe that was the way God wanted it. It was the unlearned, the ones who relied on their “common” sense, who could most easily hear the secret wisdom of God within themselves.

It is when we can’t relate to others that we can’t fathom the wisdom Sophia invites us to day in and day out, the wisdom that Jesus so perfectly modelled and somewhat imperfectly attempted to teach. Because without the ears to hear, all lessons fall on deaf ears.

And because the “Way” of Jesus is not some set of dogmas, or even a simple-to-read bullet-list of “Thou Shalt Not’s.” It is simply a “Way” of living ... of feeling and finding our way through all the dogma and rules that we come across in life ... and then of actually making intelligent choices. The objective of every individual person, of every family unit, of every small community, and even of world-power institutions like the US Government and the Roman Catholic Church, should not be to impose long lists of rules and regulations that will somehow serve to insure life, love, and the restoration of Eden. Their real purpose is supposed to be to teach others how to apply any “code” of legal or canon law.

Which might be why those good-old-time-religion preachers insist there are no contradictions in scripture, and then have to go out of their way to avoid proclaiming those which regularly show themselves. One commentator calls these contradictions “balance,” because they help to remind us that little snippets from the Bible are nothing but little snippets, primarily used as proof-texting. As we talked a bit about at our First Friday gathering last evening, we need to focus on the big picture, on the overall meaning of the Bible itself, or at least of a complete pericope, rather than cutting and pasting to serve our own prejudices.

Zechariah says the one who rules ... really rules ... shall command peace to the nations. Paul says the Spirit of Life dwells within us eternally. Jesus asks us to follow his way of life, which is meek and modest and refreshing and filled with Light.

We are rooted in the same ground of being. But, as the psalmist says, “every soul has free will to choose life or death.” We have a reason for being ... a purpose ... a mission ... for the good of the whole. But we have to have ears to hear. And we have to make a choice. And we have to keep our feet upon the road that we chose.

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That was the big picture. Still is. Always will be.

Without end. Amen.

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## 7.22.17 Homily

(16th Ordinary) Feast of Mary Magdalene

Wis 12:13,16-19; Ps 86:5-6,9-10,15-16; Rom 8:26-27; Magdala 8:11b-19; 9:5

Elsie Hainz McGrath

On this special feast day of Mary Magdalene I have chosen to read from her gospel instead of from the prescribed Sunday gospel according to Matthew. I read this very gospel at our closing liturgy on Friday of last week, in the Holy Wisdom Monastery and in the company of 76 other women priests. Mary of Magdala, called the apostle to the apostles by the church, was the first apostle of the risen Christ, and her voice cries out to be heard again in this oppressively patriarchal society. Her gospel was discovered in Cairo in 1896, fully 50 years before the epic find at Nag Hammadi, but is still fairly universally unknown. The gospel is short, apparently only 19 pages as written, but with just nine of those 19 surviving. It actually begins on page 7, the first six pages being lost. Considered to be a Gnostic writing, it fails to show up in most presentations of the Gnostic Scriptures. Just as the Magdalene continues to suffer the sin of deliberate misrepresentation from pulpits around the world, due to egregiously erroneous teaching from our canonical scriptures, so she is also consciously and conscientiously written out of Christian history by Christianity's victors: the patriarchy that rules the world.

Seems to me this gospel blends very well with the other readings for today. Had I begun reading a bit ahead of this portion, we would have heard Jesus telling Peter that there is no "sin of the world," but only whatever sin we bring upon ourselves. Had we heard the prescribed gospel, from Matthew, we would have heard the parable of the wheat and the weeds, and Jesus' admonishment to allow the weeds to grow along with the wheat. Kind of parallel readings, perhaps, especially as weeds are defined as any foreign body that we didn't plant. But Jesus says we did plant them. They are the mistakes, the sins, the enemy. They are all ours, and they can generally be identified by their common ending: -ism. Plant a field of wild flowers and they are a thing of beauty. Find a wild flower in the rose garden and it is despised and rooted out. There is no "sin of the world."

In a nutshell, the Gospel of Mary of Magdala presents a piece of Jesus' teaching to the apostles, apparently in the Upper Room after his resurrection. Then "he departed from them," and then they began to equivocate: "How can we do this? They'll kill us too? Woe is us." And Mary comforted them. And spoke to them of Jesus' grace and presence. And of the secret wisdom she had been given by him. So they got angry at her and reproached her as a mere woman and a liar. Only Levi (who is Matthew) stood up for her. Then they repented, and went out from there to preach the good news, the news that the kingdom of God truly is within us and among us.

The secret wisdom Mary shared begins on page 10 but then skips to page 15. Pages 11-14 are missing. It appears to be a different look at the seven deadly sins versus the seven holy virtues, actually perhaps a rendering of the seven chakras. Jesus calls it the nous, which is a philosophic term for deep-down intellect...divine understanding...gnosis. It's Sophia Wisdom! And those who "get it" are those who are becoming "fully human" – which is the true goal for the daughters and sons of God.

The gospel seems to me to venture also more mystically into that thin space we speak of when we try to talk about the transition from life into death, or from this life into the life to come... that place that Catie is moving into... maybe even that place that Jesus was IN when he came to the apostles in the Upper Room "not yet ascended to the Creator." Maybe it's purgatory, though I tend to think that theological construct applies more appropriately to our lives here, in the morass that all those billions and trillions of individual sins has created, and which are virtually engulfing the sinless world we were given to care for.

Each week, here in this sacred community, we pray that we might become the Christ, the Anointed One of God, for others. The apostle Paul showed the early communities how to do that. Paul was the Christ for them. But before Paul there was Mary. The Magdalene, apostle to the apostles, led the way. She became the Christ for them, so that they might leave the darkness of the Upper Room and go into the light of day, preaching the good news of God's radical love and forgiveness with the passion and courage of reformers. They changed the world.

My week in Holy Wisdom Monastery was difficult. Uncomfortable. Demanding. We discovered together, in that monastery, that our questions are far more important than any answers, any rules, any boundaries that seek to confine us or divide us or entice us to sin against ourselves and one another. In a sense, we reclaimed our voices as women. We reclaimed our ministries as priests. We reclaimed our mission as reformers. We repented, and we went out from there to

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preach the good news, the news that the kingdom of God truly is within us and among us.

Sisters and brothers of Therese, we all know our roles. WE are the Christ for others. And WE are changing the world!

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7.29.17 Homily

17th Ordinary

1 Kgs 3:5,7-12; Ps 119:57,72,76-77,127-130; Rom 8:28-30; Matt 13:44-46

Elsie Hainz McGrath

This is a page from my journal. As I wrote it, it occurred to me that it could be a homily for today's readings. This is what I wrote.

It is July 28. Last night I received a text from Anne: "(The hospice nurse) said it is time to trade alertness for comfort." I woke this morning from an extended dream of Catie's journey. She was alert. And comfortable. And somewhat ethereal. She wore a fitted dress, brocaded, hem just above the knees, and she was slim and lovely. On her deathbed, in turns serenely sleeping and/or primly sitting on the edge of the bed with bare toes barely touching the floor. A retinue of people wandered in and out of the room, taking turns at sitting beside her in vigil. The whole room was open, enclosed in glass, and empty but for the bed and three or four straight chairs at one end of it. I had brought oils, but hesitated to go in and disturb the scene that played out before me. I sat down outside and watched. My daughter was with me. Then she was my mother. (It was perhaps her dress that Catie wore!)

Mary Wuller breezed out and spoke a few words to us before leaving. Those who were sitting in the room turned and saw us, and waved for us to come in. They were Catie's friends that I had met at her bedside, familiar but also strangers. As we all are, really. But not in truth. Sweet mystery of life.

Catie was lying in repose. Then she sat up, appeared to be wanting to read something that she didn't have there, and my mom said, "Go." I went into the room and asked her if she'd like to read the NCR, she smiled and nodded yes, and I handed it to her. (I had apparently carried it into the room with me.) She opened it up and it became a lovely full-color single sheet of parchment. I said, "It's beautiful, isn't it?" and she smiled and nodded yes again. She was aglow as she scanned, silently and quickly, whatever that newspaper had become in her hands.

The whole scene was reminiscent of the scenes from countless near-death-experience stories. There are no walls, no barriers, no separations.

When my husband transitioned from "here" to "there" his glowing eyes and beautiful face were focused on what looked to all of us like the wall at the other end of the tiny hospital room he was in. And it was absolutely obvious that he was seeing beyond that wall, straight into his eternity. The kingdom of God is among us.

Catie loved the NCR (National Catholic Reporter). Every week at Therese she would get the latest discard from either the Wullers' or me, depending upon who had finished with theirs first. I was taking the NCR to her regularly, even at The Lodge, until she clearly said she could no longer read it. It is a newspaper, on newsprint that leaves your fingers decidedly black, with mostly black and white news from the liberal left wing of the Roman Catholic Church in the US. I would guess the significance of its transformation is The Good News of Catie's own transfiguration. The dress, Catie's appearance, my mother and my daughter. Wholeness. Holiness. Connectedness. Oneness. The Cosmic Continuum of Life. The kingdom of God is within us.

I woke up. I went to my phone, anticipating the news of Catie's passing in the night. The news, instead, was of John McCain's opposition to the government-imposed killing of millions of Americans through stony-hearted medical legislation. There is a correlation in that, a coincidence of events between my dream and what we call reality. "Coincidence" is the work of our hands in concert with the intent of God for the good of the whole. The kingdom of God is here.

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