

Spiritual Message – March 2017
Called to a spirituality of welcome
... welcoming life in its fragility

This year, as a province, we are focusing on three aspects of a spirituality of welcome:
welcoming people and events
welcoming immigrants and refugees
welcoming life in its fragility.

Two previous spiritual messages have helped us reflect on the first two aspects of this spirituality, and today's message will hopefully help us reflect on welcoming life in its fragility.

We are all well aware of experiences of fragility or vulnerability in our personal lives, among them: the loss of loved ones; diminishing capabilities; fears of death or of loss of autonomy; feelings of uselessness and of guilt.

We are also touched by the fragility of others, including trafficked persons, the unemployed and the powerless, and victims of war and violence. And we may be equally concerned about the fragility of Mother Earth and about the future of our world.



All these situations and experiences can seem overwhelming and we may want to run away from them. So, what can "welcoming the fragility of life" mean? Do we really want to welcome life in all its fragility or do we, like so many in our culture and society, prefer to think that life should always tend towards something "bigger and better"? Do we really believe that God can bring good out of evil (Rom. 8: 28)? Is it true that life is more a mystery to be lived than a problem to be solved?

Let us look at what our Christian tradition might teach us about welcoming the fragility of life. Fr. Richard Rohr, O.S.F., focuses much of his teaching on the essential, paradoxical, and deeply challenging mystery of the cross:

God is to be found in *all things*, even in the painful, tragic, and sinful things, exactly where we do not want to look for God. The crucifixion of the God-Man is at the same moment the worst thing in human history and the best thing in human history.

...

Christians call this pattern "the paschal mystery": true life comes *only* through journeys of death and rebirth wherein we *learn who God is for us*. Letting go is the nature of all true spirituality and transformation, summed up in the mythic phrase: "Christ is dying. Christ is risen. Christ will ever come again." ¹

¹ Rohr, Richard. *Everything Belongs*. New York: The Crossword Publishing Company, 2013, 177-178.

If we look at the life of Jesus, we certainly see that Jesus accepted the fragility of life. He never ran away from experiences of suffering or vulnerability, as Ronald Rolheiser, OMI² explains so beautifully. Like a water filter that holds the dirt and toxins inside itself and gives back only the pure water, so Jesus took in hatred and gave back love; accepted bitterness and returned warmth; took in pettiness and offered compassion; accepted chaos and gave back peace; took in sin and offered forgiveness.

And although this is not easy to do, as Christians and even as human beings we are challenged to do the same. To welcome life fully, we are called, with God's help, to take in fragility, to hold it, to transform it, and to eventually give it back as something else: as love, graciousness, blessing, compassion, warmth, and forgiveness.

Life stories abound of people, not just well-known people like Jesus or Mahatma Ghandi or Helen Keller, who have done just that. These people have used their fragilities to help others and to give meaning to their own lives. I think of people I have known:

- members of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) who find life in sponsoring others suffering from addictions;
- a victim of childhood sexual abuse who, years later, said the experience was one of the blessings in her life because it helped her in her ministry to abusers as well as victims;
- a religious sister who acknowledges the never-ending losses associated with aging and dying and so helps others to serenely accept their own mortality;
- a woman whose experiences of rejection have led her to make acceptance of others the focus of her life.

Though we may often admire such people, accepting fragility goes against most contemporary "wisdom". It also went against the wisdom of Jesus' time. The Beatitudes, included in his inaugural speech, were not understood or accepted by the powerful of his time, the leaders both civic and religious. Let us ask Jesus to help us understand and live those beatitudes. May we hear Jesus speaking to us in this paraphrase of the first two Beatitudes:

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. . . . you [can then] be embraced by the One most dear to you.³

***Indeed, blessed are we when we welcome the fragility of life.
Happy are we when we live as people of the Beatitudes!***

Sister Beverley Wattling

² Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Passion and the Cross*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Franciscan Media, 2015, 54-55.

³ Peterson, Eugene H. *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress Publishing Group, 2005, 1334-1335 (Matthew 5: 3-4).