CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 4, 2022

The Prayer of an Earthen Shelter

Written by Colleen Jurkiewicz Dorman

Wisdom 9:13-18b
Philemon 9-10, 12-17
Luke 14:25-33



"This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish." – Luke 14:30

If I had to choose one of the Bible's 31,102 verses to have inscribed on my tombstone, it would be Luke 14:30.

As a companion piece, my obituary could tell the story of my life through the list of projects I never finished. Swimming lessons in preschool. Piano in the sixth grade. Every journal I've ever tried to keep. That trip to Europe. The house my husband and I designed and never built. My life is littered with these unfinished projects, races for which I could not make it across the finish line. Whether it was strength, interest, money, or something else, I just didn't have "it." I came up short.

And these are just the literal examples. Every day, I am compelled to begin building what I feel inadequate to finish. I wake up so tired, but the day must start. I don't have enough time or inspiration, but my work must be turned in. My patience is long gone, but the children must be parented.

I am writing this at 7:13 in the morning, and already my mind is racing through the tasks I must complete this day, tallying up my strength against the job and finding it insufficient. My earthen shelter is weighed down by many concerns.

When my first child was an infant and I was adjusting to the demands of working motherhood, I got into the habit of beginning each day by inviting God into my weakness. This sounds like a pious spiritual practice, but it isn't. It's a prayer born from desperation. It's not poetic and it wouldn't look pretty on the back of any holy cards. Here it is: "Lord, I have no idea how I'm going to make it through this day. I assume you have some ideas. Let's go with those ideas."

When I read of Christ's admonition to renounce our earthly possessions, I think of this clumsy prayer. My anxieties, my fears, my expectations — these are my possessions, and I cling to them like a child clings to an old, smelly blanket. My stamina, my abilities, my insight, my good intentions — these are also my possessions, but I don't have enough of them. I never have. I never will.

When I was younger, I learned to ride horses. The thing you have to accept about horseback riding is that the animal does not need to listen to you. He chooses to, and there will come a time when he chooses *not* to. He will be spooked by something and take off at a gallop you never intended, or he will become irritated and begin to buck you from his back. I learned that if you try to control the horse in his mania, you will almost certainly be thrown. The only way to stay in the saddle is to take a deep breath and become small on the back of the beast while he thrashes. Recognize the strength of the horse and melt into it. Accept it. Cling to it. Renounce control.

It's a feeling of vulnerability and fear that quickly turns to calm strength as the episode passes, the horse settles, and you find yourself still seated in the saddle, knuckles white around the reins.

It's the same feeling I have every morning when I sit and take stock of my life and myself and acknowledge that I don't have it — whatever "it" is. And I turn my empty palms to God, saying: fill me at daybreak. Turn me back to dust. Prosper the work of my hands. Make straight my paths.

- Colleen Jurkiewicz Dorman

PRAYER

Prayer
O Lord our God,
grant us to trust in your overshadowing wings.
Protect us beneath them and bear us up.
You will carry us as little children,
and even to our grey-headed age you will carry us still.
When you are our strong security, that is strength indeed.
But when our security is in ourselves, that is but weakness.
Our good abides ever in your keeping,
but in diverting our steps from you we have grown perverse.
Let us turn back to you at last, Lord, that we be not overturned.

— St. Augustine, *Confessions*