

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 20, 2020

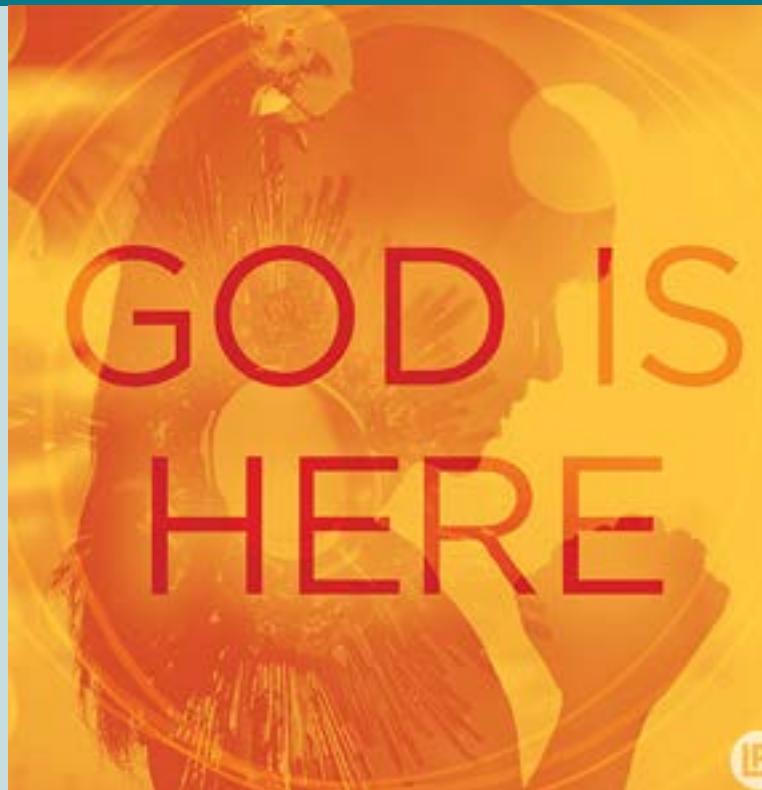
A Sign of Contradiction

Written by Angie Windnagle

Isaiah 55:6-9

Philippians 1:20C-24, 27A

Matthew 20:1-16A



I was in high school when I truly understood that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. I had professed this belief from my youngest years, but it wasn't until high school that I understood the depth of love in that tiny little host. I remember looking up during adoration and seeing God for what felt like the first time in my life. Time seemed to stop, and I looked at Him as He looked at me, and in that moment, I knew without a doubt that the God of the entire universe knew me and loved me through and through.

As I reflect back on that moment what always strikes me most is the immense humility of God, that being all powerful He would lower Himself to this host in order to let my feeble mind understand His presence. As we hear in the first reading this weekend, His ways are far above ours. I have more in common with an ant than I have with God. Yet the same God whose thoughts are "as high as the heavens are above the earth," is the same God who freely chose to take on flesh in order to save me. The utter contradiction shatters any notion the human mind could create about what God should be. Somehow in this tension of near and far, we meet God. I find this so fitting as we navigate our world and its upheaval this year. God is speaking directly to our hearts to call on Him in our disrupted plans and to seek Him not as some far-off deity, but as the God who is near and who is deeply invested in our lives.

St. Paul echoes this tension when he reflects on the desire to at once be both living on this earth in order to serve God more while also desiring to be with Him in heaven. This seems like a contradiction to our ears. We often approach mortality with trepidation and fear. Illness and disease cause us to lose peace as we seek ways to increase our years on earth. What we learn from Paul is the reminder that while this life is good, it is not our final home. His call to conduct ourselves as “worthy of the gospel” is an implicit reminder that we are simply pilgrims here and on our way home as citizens of heaven.

Jesus teaches us in the gospel what that looks like. Again, he shares a contradiction. On a human level, we expect those who work the hardest to get the first and best reward. But Jesus flips this concept upside down and says rather that, “the last will be first, and the first will be last.” At first glance, the parable might seem harsh and unfair. However, right before this the landowner says, “are you envious because I am generous?” Our God is a generous God, far beyond our human understanding. This line reminds me of the Garden of Eden and the temptation of Adam and Eve to be like God without God. God always shows His infinite love and generosity, yet we often struggle with the temptation to believe He is somehow holding out on us. Rather than holding out on us, He is actually giving us far more than we have earned. He is giving us His very life. His thoughts are far above ours, as is His generous love. Our love knows bounds, His does not.

The last will be first, which to our ears sounds backwards, but if we truly know who God is, we will be able to hear this as love. The gospel is about reorienting our hearts back to God and being fully convinced of His passionate love for humanity and understanding that we are being called to lean into that mission and take part in it. If we truly love like God loves, by deeply desiring the good of humanity, then we would desire to always be last if it meant that many souls could reach heaven.

The contradictions we hear in the readings today then, are only contradictions if we think with the mind of the world. If we put on Christ and seek him where he can be found, especially in the Eucharist, our outlook even during the darkest times will become a light for those around us.

Angie Windnagle

PRAYER

My God,
I believe, I adore, I hope and I love Thee!
I beg pardon for those
who do not believe, do not hope and do not love
Thee.
Amen.
-Prayer of Fatima