

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

17th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, July 26, 2020

What Really Matters?

Written by Rev. Mark Suslenko

1 Kings 3:5, 7-12

Romans 8:28-30

Matthew 13:44-52

OR 13:44-46



Our current journey through this pandemic forces each of us to stop and consider what is really important. Our lives have been turned upside down and we have been asked to change how we approach even our most routine of tasks. Shopping in a grocery store, visiting a loved one in a nursing home, going to work or school and countless other everyday givens now have to be thought about and negotiated in ways unfamiliar to us. For the last several months we awake each day and do what needs to be done, continue to isolate ourselves from others and attempt to maintain some normalcy to our lives.

But it all comes at a price. As human beings, we have feelings. Our experiences, and our encounters and decisions affect us. While we accept that we must change the way we visit with our loved one in a convalescent home, the emotional fallout of that change can be great. Many people have been forced to separate themselves from significant others who are dying, gravely ill or feeling the pain of isolation. While folks do what they need to do, you cannot replace experiences or embraces that had to be set aside. We continue our journey. One cannot help but realize through these challenging times what is really important. The significance, beauty, and specialness of family, friends, God, creation, community, life, hope, love, and faith are brought front and center.

Whether we realize it, the pandemic experience has changed us and continues to impact our daily rituals and color our experiences. Many relay feelings of numbness, heightened anxiety and sensitivity, irritability, sadness, depression, a sense of loss, anger, fear, trepidation, unsettledness, and even apathy. Many, if not all, of those feelings are symptoms of PTSD, which is the result of intense trauma. Perhaps it is the case that many of us find ourselves with a mild form of PTSD as a result of dealing with this pandemic, standing at a crossroads between the familiar and the unfamiliar. We know what we had, we know what we lost, but we don't know what we will find. The future is a "tabula rasa" of sorts dependent upon how things unfold day by day.

Solomon asked God for the gift of understanding so that he would know what is right. God delighted in Solomon's wish. Wisdom is a gift that comes from God and one that allows us to see what is right and true. It allows us to connect the dots of our experience and find the path to what is ultimately important. As a gift that comes from God, wisdom leads us to God. It appears, then, that as we consider the fallout from the pandemic, and the struggles we are having with racism, privilege, and power, that wisdom is the order of the day. As believers our primary task at this juncture of our journey is to know what is right. A prayer for wisdom and understanding must be on our lips. As we beg for this guidance from the Holy Spirit, we may find ourselves more capable of seeing ourselves through what is happening to us personally and in society in general.

What we know to be comfortable and familiar can be taken away. Life can always call us to change the way we conduct the business of our lives, as it has over the last several months, has in the past and will in the future. Situations and circumstances that unfold will also challenge us to look at long standing systems of governance and order, foundational principles of societal development, values, injustice that results from self-serving agendas, and established protocols. We can see how sin, all of the seven capital ones, have found their way into the formation of our foundational decisions and conquests and continue to affect decisions today. We cannot ignore what has happened to us personally or socially, as doing so will only do us grave harm. We have to be honest and realize that we focus too much energy on the unimportant superficial stuff and neglect paying attention to the things that really make a difference and have the greatest impact. Things all too easily become more significant than people, individuals can all too easily become objects to use and manipulate, and our agendas become more essential than God's. Only the wisdom that comes from God can bring light to all of our darkness.

We need to wear the correct pair of glasses when looking at life. What really matters is the Kingdom of God and when we finally realize this, we will desire it more than anything else. The Kingdom of God is the one thing in the midst of all the changing things of life that remains constant and firm. How we spend our time, ponder our life experience, consider the struggles of our world, and confront the evils of our day will reveal whether we are serving God's Kingdom or our own. Once we discover this pearl of great price, we will find ourselves experiencing profound joy. We will know that we discovered something extremely valuable and true.

None of this is easy. This holds true for trying to sift our way through the cries and anguish of our brothers and sisters as well as the complexity of our own life experience. Listening to the story that is being told within each one

of us and listening to the story of all of the companions on our journey is a good place to start. We all have a story. Solomon's story brought him to wisdom and understanding. The merchant in search for a pearl discovered similar gifts. Both found themselves with joy. The road cannot be traveled alone. We must bring our companions, God and our brothers and sisters with us, as all are needed to discern what is right.

We are facing many challenges these days. It's the perfect time to bring our relationship with God front and center and realize that God and God's Kingdom are all that really matter. We forget that the Kingdom of God is not a static entity. It intrigues the human spirit and captures our attention because it never fades away and is ever new. It has inexhaustible riches that can be buried and found time and time again and never lose its luster. No matter how challenging and complicated life gets we are never alone. We know what is not of God's Kingdom: violence, hatred, despair, exclusivity, privilege, power, inequity, fear, isolation, apathy, greed, and injustice. In understanding the root cause of the presence of these in all of our stories, we will discover a pearl and walk the path to joy. Come Holy Spirit, we desperately need your wisdom!

Rev. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

Gracious and Holy Father,
grant us the intellect to understand You,
reason to discern You, diligence to seek You,
wisdom to find You, a spirit to know You
and a heart to meditate on You.

May our ears hear You, may our eyes behold You
and may our tongues proclaim You.

Give us grace that our way of life may be pleasing
to You,
that we may have the patience to wait for You
and the perseverance to look for You.

Grant us a perfect end, Your holy presence,
a blessed resurrection and life everlasting.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

— *St. Benedict*