Hope for Healing: Ambassadors of Reconciliation in the Jubilee Year of Mercy

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Some “Theology” Reflection Questions
- Who Do We See Ourselves To Be?
- How Do We Look Upon God?
- How Do We Consider Right & Wrong?
- How Do We Consider Sin?
- What Should Our Response To Sin Be?
- How Do We Live In The World?

“Theology” Study, Word, Account of God

Is This A Truthful Image of God?
And God’s Response to Our Sin?

Is This What God Wants of His Children?

Biblical Understandings of Sin

- Old Testament Views
  - Grounding in the Covenant
  - The Decalogue as the “Ten Holy Words”
  - Role of the prophets as call to social concern and consciousness
  - Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)
New Testament Understandings

- Basic vocabulary from Hellenistic culture
- *ἁμαρτία* (hamartia) missing the mark
- *ὕπερ* (hubris) pride
- *ἀδικία* (adikia) “wrongdoing”
- Leading to *μετανοια* (metanoia) turning towards/back, a “re-thinking”
- Leading to a conversion, which can be
  - Basic and core to the person
  - as well as ongoing and deepening

How Should We Judge??

God’s Response to Our Sin

The Return of the Prodigal Son to the Forgiving Father
Easter Mission for Reconciliation:
Domenica in Albis and Divine Mercy
Sunday

- “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

  When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.” John 20: 19-22

Deconstructing This Easter Mission

- On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, ...
- What is the power of “fear”?
- What does it mean to “lock” our doors against others?
- Can we remember instances of this in our lives, in our own communities, nations, etc.?

Jesus Enters Despite the Lockout

- Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

  When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side:

  - Jesus’ Risen Presence among us
  - The gift of his Peace
  - The cost of this gift of peace (costly grace)
  - Jesus’ “Profit-Sharing” Investment Program Offer
Spirit-driven Mission

- **The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”
- Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist) give us this gift of the Spirit.
- Every gift of the Spirit, though, is for the good of the whole community.

Mercy Mission & Fishers of Persons

- What does it mean to “catch” someone?
- Not in the web of sin, but in the net of God’s grace.

Thus, the primary Gospel response to sin and injury is **not punishment and retaliation, but forgiveness and reconciliation.**

This is a **diakonia** ("ministry") of the Church, and in this spiritual ministry we are all “ambassadors of Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 5: 18-21).

And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Power over Sin & Sin’s Power over Us

- Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.
- Our power over sin: to forgive and to move to and through reconciliation.
- Sin’s potential ongoing power over us: to hold us locked in non-forgiveness.
God’s Grace Is Free but Responsorial

FORGIVENESS is not something we do for OTHER PEOPLE. We do it for OURSELVES to GET WELL and MOVE ON.

“Apostolate of the Ear”

- “Reach out, know how to listen, advise them, and teach them through our own experience.
- “By welcoming a marginalized person whose body is wound and by welcoming the sinner whose soul is wounded, we put our credibility as Christians on the line.”

St. John of the Cross

- “In the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone.”
- Quoted by Pope Francis in his The Name of God Is Mercy, p. 99.
But Are We Overlooking Something?
• The initial development of the theology of sin, and the sacramental, canonical, and theological responses all focused on the individual paradigm
• Is this paradigm fully accurate?
• Are there aspects overlooked?
• Does this capture the full range of Biblical views on sin and sinfulness?

Social Sin and Structural Evil
• Insights from Liberation Theology
• A “Thicker” Description of Sin and Evil
• However, This Requires a “Paradigm Shift”
• 2 Key “Sticking Points”
  – Sinful “Structures” which go beyond individual, moral acts
  – Social sinfulness which goes beyond individual personal culpability
Collective or Personal Sin??

Innocent Victim or Legitimate Casualty?

Response to Evil?
The Our Father

- Prayerful mission of the disciples: Forgive us our sins “as” [because, while] we forgive the sins of others.
- This is our discipleship response to our prayerful desire that God’s Kingdom more quickly come
- And that God’s will be truly done on our earth as it is in God’s Heaven.

Parables of God’s Mercy

- Lost sheep
  - Not good business sense
  - We are each one of us unique and therefore absolutely valuable to God
- Lost Drachma
- Merciful Father and the Prodigal Son
Relation of Sin & Grace

- Where sin abounds, there grace the more abounds…
- Therefore, our faith tells us that God’s grace is more prevalent/present than sin
- If there is social sin, then in some sense there must be social grace
- And this actual social grace should help us provide the antidote to social sin

Spirituality for the Ministry of Reconciliation

- Basic twin dynamics
  - Sin-->repentance-->conversion (on the part of the sinner primarily)
  - Sin-->forgiveness-->reconciliation (on the part of God, and the community)
- Confession of sin--not denial; forgiveness of sin--not “obliteration” of the fact of sin

A Jubilee Spirituality

- Biblical Understanding of the Jubilee
- Restoration of the status quo ante
- Human participation in God’s creative forgiveness
- The Season of the Lord’s favor
- Cf. Luke 4: Program for Jesus’ Ministry:
  - “Proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, set the oppressed free, & to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor
Further Marks of this Spirituality

- Spirituality of discernment and dialogue
- Spirituality of growth and liberation
- Spirituality of involvement
- Spiritual of ministry: *Ambassadors of Christ*

Where To Go From Here?

- Need to grapple with these tensions honestly
- Need to resist “retreating” back into the “individual sin” paradigm alone
- Need to recover a deeper biblical sense of sin, prophecy, conversion, and reconciliation
- And remember most of all that Jesus went to the Cross for *ALL* of us sinners!
What Might Shift?

- If we integrate Jesus’ mission of forgiveness and reconciliation as a response to sin and moral failure
- What might change?
- Different emphases?
- Different insights?
- Different pastoral responses?

Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God’s grace.
And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God’s grace.

Prayer of St. Theresa Avila

- Christ has no body on earth but yours
- No hands on earth but your hands.
- Yours are the eyes through which He looks out with compassion on the world.
- Yours are the feet with which He chooses to go about doing good.
- For as He is the Head, so you are the members
- and we are all one in Christ Jesus.