



August 20, 2017 - Maturity Reversal

Given by Pastor Mattei

17 "Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. 19 For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile." 22 Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." 23 But he did not answer her at all. (Mt 15)

Last week, a miracle happened not when Peter engineered the grand spectacle of walking on water but when Jesus grabbed Peter's hand for a docile return to the boat. He was brought back there to enjoy peace with the rest of the disciples: an initially embarrassing situation for Peter was transformed into an opportunity for spiritual growth (Mt 14:22-33). This week, Matthew's gospel reports without any hint of shame an event that reveals an opportunity for Jesus' own spiritual growth!

The silence of Jesus to the Canaanite woman's plea is quite disconcerting. But what he says later in response to her persistent request is even more disturbing. Hadn't Jesus just told his disciples that what defiles a person is what comes from the person's heart (Mt 15:17-20)? Jesus is silent. Thinking along cultural lines, he first opposes the woman's request. Then he reconsiders and adjusts his response to accommodate her.

Jesus demonstrates the true human maturity that comes from listening empathically to others, self-reflection, enough humility to acknowledge one's mistakes and to change one's mind and course. A leader is not only capable of having a following without cohesion but also of demonstrating vulnerability and decisiveness in taking responsibility for his/her own errors and embracing a sensible new direction.

Through meditation, self-reflection and prayer we can train ourselves to identify the seeds in us that we are watering. Zen master, Thich Nhat Hanh remarks: "Every thought you produce, anything you say, any action you do, it bears your signature." In fact, he explains,

Your mind is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds: seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love; seeds of craving, anger, fear, hate, and forgetfulness. These wholesome and unwholesome seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of your mind. The quality of your life depends on the seeds you water. If you plant tomato seeds in your gardens, tomatoes will grow. Just so, if you water a seed of peace in your mind, peace will grow. When the seeds of happiness in you are watered, you will become happy. When the seed of anger in you is watered, you will become angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong.¹

How do we train our heart? How do we grow out of our egocentric and even ethnocentric reality, which is culturally isolating and alienating, and mature into human beings able to appreciate the oneness of creation? We seem to walk the earth with a limiting and sinful perspective:

We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves—the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow is what is called a life of sin.²

The ideological tribalism and religious sectarianism we are experiencing worldwide is not only a sign of human immaturity but also a death producing sin. White Europeans have come to this land with a dream of creating a just society based on the values of religious tolerance, social equality and economic prosperity for all. We have watered those seeds through the progress made in recognizing the human and civil rights of all races. But we have also watered seeds of racism and greed. The inability to acknowledge, denounce and keep such seeds in check which still now produce much suffering, especially within the Native American and African American communities, is dangerously unwise. Not only that: the events in Charlottesville, NC, where Heather Heyer was run over by a white supremacist glorified as a patriot³ and the criminal acts in Barcelona and Cambrils, Spain, where 14 people died and more than one hundred were injured by jihadist “soldiers”⁴ are a direct example of how inner death begets outer death.⁵

¹ Thich Nhat Hanh and Nguyen Anh-Huong, *Walking Meditation*, 2006, 22

² Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New Directions Paperbook: 1972), 34.

³<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/08/15/north-carolina-kkk-leader-im-sorta-glad-people-got-hit-girl-died-in-charlottesville.html>

⁴ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40964242>

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:56

The vision of salvation through universal communion that God gives us (Isaiah 56:1, 6-8) will come to those who practice and maintain justice and do what is right. The blessings of God (Psalm 67) are meant to shower over and bring to full maturity seeds of peace and benevolence, reconciliation and harmony, understanding and compassion. Persevering prayer demonstrates trust in the healing power of a Word impregnated with seeds of life. With focused perseverance we can starve seeds of violence and death and water seeds of righteousness and life. Only then will Jesus be able to say, "Your faith is great and what you wish will happen."