

8-31-08 - Life Was Meant To Be Great Not Easy!
Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 'A'
Fr. Ken Lasch

Although I have never had the privilege of undergoing an MRI or CAT scan, I have heard enough about the procedure to know that it is not my personal choice for a recreation alternative. But as challenging as it might be for most of us, it can produce the same or more accurate results in a fraction of the time required by more complicated and painful procedures.

The mechanism scans all or a portion of the human body and can identify signs of life-threatening illnesses before they mature and take hold of an individual. It's really an extraordinary diagnostic.

Of course, it takes trained technicians to administer the scan and knowledgeable physicians to interpret the results. However, only after a careful review of the medical history and life-style patterns of the patient can an accurate diagnosis be made and the appropriate treatment applied.

From that point on, much depends on the disposition of the patient and his or her will to be well.

The spiritual lives of institutions and societies have a similar pattern to health diagnosis and a path to wellness. As with the physical health of the human body, the soul of an individual, the soul of the Church and the soul of a nation sometimes require an M.R.I. or a scan to detect symptoms of spiritual illness and social decay.

Among all the prophets, Jeremiah might be characterized best as one of the most effective 'scanners' of ancient Israel.

It was not a vocation he welcomed. He knew he would be rejected and rebuked by his contemporaries. His was a life-threatening vocation. At the lowest point of his career he refused to give up or give in to despair. In fact he experienced the power of God's presence and spirit: "Within me there is something like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I can hold it in no longer; I must speak up and speak out for the Lord."

He had the gift of clairvoyance that enabled him to look into the soul of Israel and into the heart of its leadership. He challenged insiders and outsiders, the high and the mighty as well as the lowly. He was fired up with justice and had no choice but to speak the truth whatever the consequences though it cost him his life. Ultimately it did.

Jeremiah was a prototype of Jesus and his words this weekend prepare us for Jesus' challenge to Peter and the disciples as recorded by Matthew.

Last week Peter in his own name and in the name of his colleagues confessed Jesus as the Messiah, [Matt 16:15-16] but he and they just didn't get it. They didn't have a clue to the meaning of his title and the cost of his mission.

To expand their understanding, Jesus issued a warning about what was to happen to the Messiah in Jerusalem. Peter became adamantly protective of Jesus, refusing to submit to such a prophecy. Instead of the "rock" (Peter's name means 'rock'), Peter became a stone and a stumbling block. Matthew cleverly connects this exchange with Peter to Jesus' rebuke of Satan after the series of temptations in the desert in the beginning of his gospel. But his rebuke to Satan, "Be gone; get out of here!" was a complete dismissal.

His rebuke to Peter on the other hand had a redemptive quality: "Get behind me and follow me where I am going." In other words, I am the leader, not you, Peter. Whereas Satan could never follow Jesus, Peter still had the opportunity to get on board and get in line. A transformation took place in that exchange and the disciples gained new insight into Jesus' call. Moreover, they learned that discipleship with Christ was not

about position, power and prestige but about truth, integrity and a self-giving love that demanded a careful examination of their lives and of their motivation for their ‘hanging out’ with Jesus.

There can be no neutrality in the life of the Christian. Whenever we gather in this assembly we take a risk knowing that the Word of God might prick our individual and collective consciences.

The word of God scans our souls as individuals, as a church and as a nation and there are prophets all around us who make us think. My godmother was a prophet in my life. She took her ‘vocation’ very seriously. She would call periodically to check up on me to make sure I was faithful to my vocation staying on the straight and narrow.

But we must be very careful to avoid a fundamentalist or literal interpretation of the Scriptures. They must be understood within the historical context in which they were written and filtered through contemporary realities. We must also take care not to be deceived by false prophets – those who justify evil in the guise of good, wolves in sheep’s clothing. In a world of easy access to whatever pleases us, we need to tune in to those who make us think rather than those who make us feel good.

We come here not only to listen but also to respond, to act ethically and morally in the fulfillment of our daily responsibilities not only as individuals but also as a parish community, as a global church and as a national citizenry in accord with our Christian conscience. This is not a subtle plug for either candidate. There are many moral issues at stake and we ought not be a ‘single issue’ church.

To be well as individuals, as a church and as a nation, we must enthrone God rather than ourselves, the president or even the Pope. To become whole as individuals and as a community, we must be faithful to Jesus unto death.

And here is a prophetic prayer from the pen of a twentieth century prophet that may stir the all too quiet waters of our spiritual indolence:

Grant us prudence in proportion to our power,
Wisdom in proportion to our science,
Humaneness in proportion to our wealth and might.
And bless our earnest will to help all races and peoples
to travel, in friendship with us,
Along the road to justice, liberty and lasting peace:

But grant us above all to see that our ways
are not necessarily your ways,
That we cannot fully penetrate the mystery of your designs
And that the very storm of power now raging on this earth
Reveals your hidden will and your inscrutable decision.
Grant us to see your face in the lightning of this cosmic storm,
O God of holiness, merciful to all:
Grant us to seek peace where it is truly found! In your will, O God, is our peace! Amen”

[Passion for Peace by Thomas Merton, Edited by William H. Shannon, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, NY, 1995. Appendix: Merton’s Prayer for Peace, pages 328-329]

One of the areas of prophetic ministry for Christians is to tend to the unfinished task of the healing of victims of clergy abuse. You can help not only by speaking out but by helping us to help victims directly with counsel, financial aid, the restoration of their dignity. Please consider our appeal:

Victims of sexual abuse didn't choose which road they took in life. Others chose it for them, leading to pain and suffering.

But there is one road that can bring those wounded back to health. It's The Road to Recovery.

Please help The Road to Recovery reach those in need of a healing way home. Send your donations to:

Road to Recovery, Inc.
PO Box 1908
Livingston NJ 07039

All donations are tax deductible and all money goes to direct aid and services to victims transitioning to survival.

For additional information, click website road-to-recovery.org