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Daily Reflections

Journeying through Lent



Center for Spiritual Development

LOVE AS JUSTICE

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Excerpts from Today's Readings

Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do good. Make justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow. Come now, let us set things right, says the LORD: Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; Though they be crimson red, they may become white as wool.

ISAIAH 1:16-18

"The scribes and the Pharisees have taken their seat on the chair of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice.... They love places of honor at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues, greetings in marketplaces, and the salutation 'Rabbi.' As for you, do not be called 'Rabbi.' You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers. Call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven. Do not be called 'Master'; you have

but one master, the Christ. The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

MATTHEW 23:2-3, 6-12

Reflection

Throughout the emergence of identity in the worlds of the Hebrews and the Christians, as they discover the power and mystery of love and mercy in the lives of the faithful, they must confront the institutional entities that turn spiritual truth into organizational posturing. It becomes easy to proclaim the words and practices of a transfigured people, while these realities are lived out in a world apart. Religious leadership may claim that **justice is their aim; that they redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, and defend the widow.** Yet, their personal choices undercut any sincerity in their words. Their public voices may trumpet the suffering poor and the socially abandoned, while they socially encourage their communities to turn jaundiced eyes to those most neglected. If what you preach is not what you legislate, you stand far from Jesus in your faith. Centuries ago, Isaiah clearly discerns the many layers of fidelity and falsehood that infuse the language of faith and justice in the religious sphere.

Then we turn our gaze to the generations of Matthew, whose gospel holds no space for the scribes and Pharisees who seek to amass the public attention that accrues to many who profess what **they preach but they do not practice.** Jesus has seemingly infinite patience in the Gospel for all the foibles of human life, but reserves a harsh judgment for those hypocrites who, in the name of the Law or religion, manipulate members of the community while failing to observe the covenant they espouse. He encourages the faithful to reserve their religious honorifics—Rabbi, Father, Master—for God and the Christ. This eliminates the false sense of authority or power that can be adopted by those whose lives should be given over to humility, self-sacrifice, and service of all: **The greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled; but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.**

As Isaiah and Matthew make radically clear, the sincerity and fidelity of our religious lives cannot be measured by our community practices, our devotions, or our public professions of care for God's lost ones. Words or gestures are hollow masks for hearts that are not filled with loving care for those whom others ignore. Our identity is not a gathering of 'truths' or 'actions' that name us before God and neighbor. God's Covenant from the days of Moses and

beyond is one based on fidelity of the heart and familial relationship. Justice does not foster a love of neighbor or stranger. That love is what fosters justice. That love *is* justice. When we find ourselves motivated by the fervor of anger or scorn, our justice is ultimately a form of vengeance, not redemption. Our Lenten odyssey is one of releasing love in our actions, so that the transformation we share and experience is yet another birthing of God's love, not self-justification or legalistic outcomes. In these days that tout self-righteousness over the fruits of mercy, we are perpetually carried by love to a justice that can truly save the world.



Juan Diego
Photo by David Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- Do you often feel drawn to express love through the gestures of faith or the ethics of change, rather than surrendering to the love at their heart?
- What experiences in your community life strengthen your urge to let love lead in your efforts for justice?
- How might you share the power of love-in-action as you walk with others for the recreation of God's world?

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