

April 27, 2024

Daily Reflections

Journeying through Easter



Center for Spiritual Development

THE GREATEST OF THESE

By Julie Mussché

From the First Letter to the Corinthians

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

1 CORINTHIANS 13:3

Reflection

In Catholic school Religion Class I learned about the four types of love: Philia, Storge, Eros and Agape. Certainly, there are many expressions of love, from family, to friendships, to romantic love, to our love for God and God's love for us -- and then there's our expression of God's love toward others. In the excerpt from 1 Corinthians, we learn that love is the greatest virtue of all, and the ideals of Agape are richly represented in the book of Acts. Those readings inspired the following imaginative interpretation, which was first published May 2020, and intended to depict love in action.

The time of this story is the early part of the second century in the city of Corinth, a large and prosperous urban center on the Aegean Sea. The population was diverse at the time, including affluent freedman, Greek, Roman and other peoples engaged in fishing or commerce. Paul had spent time in the region, writing two epistles to the young and conflicted congregations nearly one hundred years prior. Corinth had numerous Christian communities, some Gentile and others Jewish or mixed. Many congregations gathered to worship in house churches. Absent a formal liturgy as we know it today, there was a text called the Didache, or the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, that provided general guidelines for Christian practice and behavior. This story opens on the day of worship at the home of Leana, a Roman widow and patroness who has opened her home for the congregation assembling to worship.

"Peace and the Grace of God be with you, Leana," Yoachim and Devorah chorused as they entered the modest home. "And also with you," responded Leana, and then continued, "the others should be arriving soon." Devorah immediately smelled the food that had been prepared for the worship service and felt her empty stomach growl with anticipation. She reached in her carrying pouch and extracted several pieces of flat bread, and handed them to Leana. "We brought this for the love feast." Leana received the contribution, thanking God for his generosity in her life. She thought to herself of the time before her husband had died and how she would have laughed at and mocked the humble offering of flat bread.

Her reverie was broken by the entry of Sigibert, Leana's manservant from Gaul. Quickly following behind him was Verene, another servant, a young woman from Egypt. "Please help Brother Yoachim and Sister Devorah get settled, Sigibert," and then passing the bread to the young Egyptian girl, "Verene, please take this bread and place it with the other loaves on the table." Devorah felt slightly embarrassed at the thought of their humble offering situated next to the more refined baked goods.

Over the next half hour, the rest of the congregation arrived, each person bringing something to contribute to the feast. The assembly was pretty small -- Leana had only recently opened her home as a place to worship, and all were welcomed to share in the celebration. The diverse collection of people included Valerius, a Roman Tribune, Climas, a slave and former prostitute, and Procopius, a Greek artisan and God-fearer.

Everyone, including the servants, sat at the table and shared the meal. The feast began with the Lord's Prayer. Once the feasting had ended, a prayer of thanksgiving was offered, and the Eucharist prayers were initiated. All present

had been baptized and so were able to fully participate in the ritual. At the opening of the Eucharist, Valerius caught movement out of the corner of his eye and instinctively grabbed for his dagger hilt. He gruffly asked the Greek artisan, "What odd movement was that you committed, Procopius?" Climas cringed in fear at the sound of the Roman's booming voice.

"You mean this?" Procopius quickly touched his forehead with the thumb of his right-hand, first moving down and then across, "It's something I saw a Syrian Christian do at a baptism while traveling through Antioch last spring season."

The Roman barked, "What superstitious custom is that?"

"It represents a cross," Procopius gently answered.

Valerius immediately flushed with shame, remembering the numerous men he had crucified. "I beg your forgiveness, Brother Procopius. I am not worthy of sharing this thanksgiving with you."

"You are forgiven, Valerius, and God forgives you as well." The Greek looked on the humbled Roman with compassion. "Leana, will you lead us in the blessing of the wine?"

Leana said the prayer over the wine, which had been brought by Valerius, followed by the blessing over the bread prepared by Devorah and Yoachim. After a moment of quiet, she looked at Clamis and asked, "Clamis, do you feel confident to recite the closing prayer?"

"I think I can speak it, Amma," the recent convert replied.

"I can help you, son," Valerius encouragingly nudged him.

Climas initiated the closing prayer: "We thank you, holy Father, for your holy name, which you have caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made known to us through your son Jesus; to you be the glory forever..."



Brown Sand Love Text on Seashore
Photo by Porapak Apichodilok

For Pondering

Where do you find examples of love in the narrative?

For Prayer

If you have a moment, spend some time with 1 Corinthians 13.

What catches your attention?

How is God inviting you to explore truth in the world?

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