



The Word ...

“But the wise shall shine brightly
like the splendor of the firmament,
and those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever.”
(rom Dn 12:1-3)

Pondering the Word ...

Two weeks ago, many Christian churches celebrated All Saints Day, a time to recognize and honor the Communion of Saints that guides, prays for, and labors with us as we work each day on our own saintliness.

I thought about the various patron saints and how busy they must be. Heck, St. Anthony spends a good amount of time each day just dealing with me as I look for my keys or glasses! And St. Martha? Anyone who has a party has to go through her, so she must be gearing up for a busy season! St. Jude, the patron of lost causes, has likely been working overtime these days. And a saint you might not know -- Isadore of Seville, the patron saint of technology – well, I can only imagine his call center!

It seems like a lot of work being a saint. Are there other options? Jesus tells us on Saturday we will be like angels (Lk 20:36). That doesn't sound like a bad gig. Being like an Old Testament angel could be fun!

Or...what would it be like to shine in the firmament, a star that leads others to justice?

Living the Word ...

When we imagine “stars” of justice, we might think of Martin Luther King, Jr. or Gandhi, or Nelson Mandela; or, more current leaders like Greta Thunberg; or, in the US, the late John Lewis or Revs. William Barber and Liz Theoharis, co-directors of the Poor People's Campaign. We may dismiss our ability to be so bold as to lead others to justice.

No, not many of us are called to lead national or global movement for Justice with a capital J -- the kind that changes laws, the culture, and the lives of large groups of people. But have you ever tried to “lead” a homeless person or a refugee through the morass of local, state, and federal laws just so they can get an ID so they can even apply for a job? Many of us have no idea what it means to spend several hours on public transportation getting back and forth to Social Services; waiting for hours to speak to someone, only to be told to come back tomorrow to speak to someone else. Could your wisdom, your patience, your companionship be the guiding light that leads one person, one family to some semblance of justice?

Wendell Barry writes: “*You have to be able to imagine lives that are not yours.*” Many of us don't take the time to even imagine the lives of the disenfranchised, but I promise, you can get a small taste right in your own community. What might the firmament look like... how much could we light up the night sky...if each one of us would commit to lead one person to justice? We could dim the harsh neon lights of the brightest city!

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Nov 15: *“Indignation seizes me because of the wicked who forsake your law. Though the snares of the wicked are twined about me, your law I have not forgotten. Redeem me from the oppression of men...”* (Ps 119)

I am struck, yet again this week, by the number of Old Testament readings that, depending on which side of the political and/or religious divide you stand, both would claim as their own, their battle cry, their marching orders. There’s a lot of violence in these readings as well. Like Jesus, I weep that I--that we--cannot or do not see what makes for peace. **Today’s reflection:** *Peace with one another stems from peace within ourselves and in our relationship with our Creator. When you seek peace with your God, who or what do you pray to? Is it an Old Testament God destroying enemies? Jesus? The Spirit? Is it an institution?* **Provision:** *Seek peace in your interactions today.*

Tue, Nov 16: *Eleazar spoke and went immediately to the instrument of torture. Those who shortly before had been kindly disposed, now became hostile toward him because what he had said seemed to them utter madness.* (2 Mc 6:18-31)

The Books of Maccabees are not found in the Hebrew Bible, and frankly, they are not high on my list. But there are pearls of wisdom to be found amid the nationalistic violence. Here, Eleazer refuses to participate in the ruse, suggested by his long-time buddies, to save his own skin. They turn on him when he chooses death over falsehood. No admiration for his courage. No sympathy. Just hostility. **Today’s reflection/provision:** *Group-think can blind us to the courage of those who stay true to their convictions. Instead of being hostile towards someone with whom you disagree, listen to them without judgment or defensiveness. Has group-think impacted you?*

Wed, Nov 17 *“But I in justice shall behold your face; on waking, I shall be content in your presence.”* (Ps 17)

Or, as the Hebrew translation reads, *“I take my fill, wide awake, of your image.”* I’d love to wake up every morning and have lots of time to contemplate God’s presence. But sometimes, I can’t sit in quiet for an hour; instead, my prayer is active, found in snippets throughout the day. That’s why, taking in, wide awake, God’s image in everything I see, everyone I meet is so important. I’m happy to say I can usually do that. But finding contentment there? That can be hard. **Today’s reflection:** *The word content is powerful. Reflect on times and situations when you are content.* **Provision:** *We may think of contentment as a feeling that comes over us out of nowhere, but try to seek contentment. Look for God everywhere, and let that awareness lead you to a place of peace.*

Thu, Nov 18: *As Jesus drew near Jerusalem, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If this day you only knew what makes for peace...”* (Lk 19:41-44)

This reading is followed immediately by the story of Jesus clearing the temple. His weeping turns to anger as he confronts the commercialism taking hold of the sacred space. He is really emotional today; perhaps he is facing the reality of how this visit to Jerusalem will end. **Today’s reflection/provision:** *Put yourself in this scene. How does it feel to witness Jesus’ deep and very human emotions? Has anything in your experience driven you to such emotion? We acknowledge Jesus’ humanity, but sometimes we “sanitize” it. If something is causing you deep sorrow or anger, step back to see what’s behind it. Bring your angst to Jesus. Ask him to help you sort it out.*

Fri, Nov 19: *There was great joy among the people that the disgrace of the Gentiles was removed. Judas and his brothers decreed that the days of the dedication of the altar should be observed with joy and gladness.* (1 Mc 4:36-37, 52-59)

Today we hear the story behind Chanukah, the Jewish holiday to commemorate the reconsecration of the altar that took place around 135 BC. (This year, it begins November 28.) There is joy among the people that they can again worship together. I am looking forward, as I know many of you are, to reuniting with family and community this Christmas season. **Today’s reflection:** *Look back over the past two years. Mourn what has been lost. Give thanks and pray for those who have sacrificed so much. Give thanks for growth you’ve experienced through this time of pandemic.* **Provision:** *Two things to consider: There may be people we will see again with whom we have had bitter disagreements. Initiate a truce. Keep certain topics off the agenda. Allow yourselves to be together without bitterness. And, we tend to have short memory spans. Let us always commemorate the joy and the gifts of family and community.*

Sat, Nov 20: *“He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”* (Lk 20: 27-40)

Today’s reflection: *If you have lost a loved one, holiday seasons are hard. Take Jesus’ words today to heart. To God, all are alive. If you can, allow fond memories to lighten the burden of grief. Be assured your loved ones live in God’s presence. Or, if your own spirit is waning, give God to opportunity to enliven your soul.* **Provision:** *If you know someone alone this holiday season, be present to them, not with words, but with a shoulder, your listening ears, your very self.*