

Novena of Grace

Tuesday 3.6.18

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On this fourth day of our Novena of Grace, we continue to bring our deep desires to God, and to one another, trusting that through the intercession of St Francis Xavier and this St Ignatius community, those desires may be brought to fullness through us. Over these last days, we have explored forgiveness and healing, cultivating our inner peace through our authentic selves, and the ways in which our expectations and God's surprises can connect us to a bigger picture of who we are and God's desires for us. I can already feel our seeds of peace germinating and taking root.

Today, I'd like to invite us to spend some time contemplating peace in our relationships with one another.

I have a confession to make. I've never been good at going to confession. I've never felt very comfortable with the sacrament of reconciliation. My first introduction to it was actually really magical as a budding young Catholic. I have vivid memories of my CCD class preparing for the sacrament of First Reconciliation, and our parish priest, in his loving Irish brogue, asked us "Does God love us?" and we, in unison, enthusiastically yelled "Yes!" Then he asked us "Even when we're bad?" and we, a little more hesitantly said "Yes"? And then he asked "Even when we're really really bad?" And we sort of looked around at each other unsure but hoping the answer was still "Yes". It of course was. A resounding YES!

I still remember this as one of the first true recognitions I had of God's mercy: that God loves me no matter what, even if I'm really really bad. Now, being an anxious kid, and a real people pleaser who wanted to look good, like I had all my ducks in a row, I didn't exactly embrace the vulnerable spirit needed for true Reconciliation. The vulnerability needed to bring my broken places to another person, say them out loud, and ask for forgiveness. So instead I found a few token phrases that didn't seem too bad, but were at least something (because you have to bring something to confession right?) and my sweet parish priest met me with kindness and love and helped me know I was forgiven, not just for the token things I found to say, but for all the things I left unsaid as well.

As I've gotten older, confession is still something that challenges me. My anxious brain still goes on overload. I still struggle to say the ways I've wronged someone or myself or God out loud. But bringing my brokenness into a space where someone else can hear it and help me feel forgiven is vital to my healing, and worth the overload. 10 years ago,

when I first made the Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life, I was invited to try a another way of revealing myself to God. A Colloquy. A conversation. I was invited to sit side-by-side with Jesus like I would a friend and talk about the ways that I was letting things get in the way of our relationship - of our friendship. How we weren't spending enough time together in prayer and things felt distant. How hiding things from your friend makes it hard for them to know you and support you. How friends can't help unless you ask for it and let them know you need it. How easy it is to hurt someone else, intentionally or unintentionally, and how hard it can be to say it out loud and ask for their forgiveness. Talking with Jesus in this way unlocked a path for us to be in right relationship and opened new understanding for me about the importance of being in right relationship with the people around me as well.

Today's readings help us explore the importance of reconciliation on our journey towards embracing peace in our broken world. And not just reconciliation between us and God, but also the reconciliation we find with one another. With the people we have hurt and the people who have hurt us. With people we disagree with. With people we are frustrated by. Today's readings are powerful examples of a willingness to stand before God and ask for what we need.

In the first reading, we hear an invitation to come to God with contrite hearts and a humble spirit - none of the trappings of this world, but rather just following with whole hearts. A nice reminder from God that we don't have to have all the pieces just right to be in right relationship with God or each other. No elaborate "I'm sorry" gifts here - just authentic, honest selves. Nothing fancy is required to offer our lives in service to one another as God calls us.

In our Gospel, we hear of the kind of right relationship Jesus wants us to have with one another, and with God. We come to God with our brokenness, our humanness, our deep down places where we have wronged ourselves, one another, and God. And God forgives us, reconciles our relationship - the way this master forgives his servant - whole-ly and completely. And so it is with us - we are called to be in right relationship with each other. And not just for the wrongs we have done, but for the ways we treat one another. Do we show each other kindness? Do we see the whole person in front of us? Do we treat each person we meet with the love and care that God treats us? Do we strip away the worldly trappings and offer one another our humble spirits and contrite hearts?

What if we treated one another the way we hope and trust God treats us - what if we saw God in one another - not just here in this church, but on the streets and on social

media and in our offices and in our homes. If we held each person as their whole, broken, in-need-of-healing self, and if we were part of that healing for them and for each other. I wonder what my days would look like if I could hold that space and presence for others the way I trust God holds it for me.

I am not a demonstrator or a protester. I don't stand in the street with a sign and shout to the world what I believe or how I want the world to change. I am not a politician. I do not feel called to civil service. These very public ways of creating change in the world are not my gifts. But being in right relationship. Sowing seeds of peace with each person I meet. Seeing the best in people and situations, trying to bring people closer to their loving God - these are movements in myself I can embrace and ways I feel I can create a more peaceful world. I invite you to take some time during this Novena to pray with God about the ways you are being invited to be in right relationship. The ways you are invited to forgive and ask for forgiveness. The ways you are witnessing the unfolding and surprise of God's peace in your everyday.

Can we sit with someone who has hurt us? See their pain too, acknowledge the ways our pains intersect, and build reconciling communities? Can we love them, even when they're bad? Even when they're really really bad? Can we forgive seventy-seven times?

From Wendell Berry -
We hurt, and are hurt,
And have each other for healing.
It is healing. It is never whole.

As we continue our Novena, may we recognize places in our hearts and in our lives where we can offer moments of reconciliation. Of kinship. Of belonging to one another, so that we together can come to the fullness of God's kingdom here on Earth.