

Please note, this summer we are re-running reflections from the last B cycle, 2018.

[Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time 2018 \(Year B\)](#)

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Mark 4:26-34

By Fr. Daniel Horan, OFM, PhD

In an age when the structural injustices of racism, misogyny, economic inequality, war, and so many other forms of discrimination and harm are on the forefront of our individual and collective consciences, it can be difficult to believe that God is present in our midst. How is the Spirit of God working in our history? Where can we find the Creator in tragedy after tragedy? What are we to say to those who suffer and how are we to preach the Good News in a time like this?

Sadly, too often unhelpful clichés like “God has a plan” or “God draws with crooked lines” are uttered in place of substantive engagement with the situation in which we find ourselves. Today’s readings offer a different approach: one that takes seriously the Lucan proclamation that “nothing is impossible for God” while at the same time recognizing that time and history are the means by which God works rather than miraculously jumping in to effect change in the short term.

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that part of our baptismal calling is to continuously “read the signs of the times” and “interpret them in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes*). This essential aspect of Christian life in the modern world aligns well with the second dimension of the now-classic “see—judge—act” model of social engagement discussed by John XXIII in his encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra*.

Accordingly, we are invited to take seriously what is happening in the world around us, to keep ourselves abreast of local and global events, and recognize the important issues that affect our sisters and brothers—especially those who are most vulnerable. Once we have a sense of what is happening, we then move to “judge” or interpret the signs of the times “in the light of the Gospel.” And this is where this Sunday’s readings offer particular insight.

Interpreting what is happening around us according to the Gospel is to learn to analyze or judge history differently than we might according to our own agendas or interests. The first pericope in today’s Gospel cautions us to embrace a certain humility. God is the one who, in Christ Jesus, has disclosed God’s Self to us by means of Revelation. God has planted the seed of the Kingdom in the world, and

the manner in which that Kingdom comes to complete fruition is beyond any one of us to know. While God's work is somewhat mysterious, it is nevertheless not automatic. We have been tasked as co-workers in this land, those who also cooperate in the inauguration of the Kingdom. But the plan is not ours, the path not of our making. Those who assist in the harvesting of the Kingdom of God are meant to follow God's lead—to judge like the landowner, to interpret the situation by God's standards.

On this theme, the second reading from the Second Letter to the Corinthians summarizes our method as those called to “judge” the circumstances around us as a matter of walking “by faith, not by sight.” Faith is our response to God's self-disclosure, our answer of “yes” to God's invitation of “follow me.” Such a disposition suggests a way of reading the signs of the times in a radically different way than we might otherwise be inclined to read them when left to our own cultural or social biases. This reading also reminds us of our need to be courageous. It is always easier to step back, ignore the sufferings of others, and be sure that our own comfort, power, or security are protected than it is to risk the courageous interpretation of our time's circumstances with the light of the Gospel and the eyes of our Creator.

It seems that too often we Christians stop with the “judging” aspect of this process of Christian engagement. And yet, we are called to “act” as well, to do something. We gather together at the Lord's Table each week, that source of our faith and that summit of our work on behalf of the Kingdom, in order to go out into the world and act on behalf of God. As so many scripture passages make clear, mystics and Saints attest, and our own experiences affirm—God works through us and does so over time. Like the trees and shrubs described in this Sunday's readings, the work of Christian discipleship doesn't happen overnight.

It happens through the community of faith brought together by God's call. And it requires a keen attunement to the world around us, a willingness to risk interpreting such signs in the light of the Gospel, and the courage to act in response. Only then will the plants of God's Kingdom grow and the harvest of the Lord be gathered.

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