

Chapters 6 & 7 – Holy Longing

Take a few moments to think about why church is important to you using either words or simple phrases. When you have a couple, please come up and write them on the poster board.

Rolheiser starts Chapter 5 out by stating that people want church when they want it, especially for rites like Baptism, Marriage, and Burial...they want the kingdom of God but not the church. In many ways, they want God when they need Him. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard someone tell me they do not need to go to church because they have a relationship with God. They like to go out in the woods and pray to God and see nature for example. And this is great, but we have lost our spirituality of ecclesiology.

What does the word ecclesiology mean? One could define it as the theology as applied to the nature and structure of the Christian Church. And as we have discussed over the past two (2) sessions, we the people are the church. Long before there were buildings or institutions, Jesus formed a community around himself. We are intended to be apostolic in nature. In other words, our very nature, who we are intended to be, is to share Christ. WE are intended at the most fundamental level to share the love of Christ. As we talked about last week, we are the Body of Christ, therefore we participate in His mission TODAY.

So, let me ask a few questions and you tell me whether these are true or false:

- Everyone at church thinks the same way
- Everyone at church is compatible

To be apostolic is not to hang out with people who are like us but to stand with those who are different. What bridges us together is hearing the word of God, professing the Creed, mutual forgiveness, sharing of the Eucharist. We are transcended...go beyond our own limits, by the power of God who we hold as our creator and our redeemer.

- We go to church to get away from the difficulties of the world
- We go to church to commiserate the difficulties we face

We go to church because we receive God who is more powerful AND merciful than any fears or difficulties we may have. We often find strength in one another because we are the Body of Christ! We receive the Eucharist which means thanksgiving. For us to truly be thankful, we must offer ourselves, as Paul said in Romans as a living sacrifice...to become what we receive to the world today. We find nourishment in the Eucharist for our spiritual journey and are guided by the Spirit.

- The people at church are just like my family in a psychological (mind or emotion) sense

Church IS a community of people. However, the people in the community cannot replace the intimacy we find with our spouse or family. For the most part, we all have some form of unique bond with our families that goes beyond what we experience with our community at church. I must confess I struggled with this section of the book a bit. When we go to church, we encounter Christ not only through our community, or through the Word of God, but in the

Eucharist. We literally receive the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ into our very person...we see him, we hear him...the Body of Christ...the Blood of Christ, we verbally affirm him...Amen, we touch/hold him, we taste him, engaging all our senses, we abide...become one with him...now that is intimate. The next time you receive the Eucharist, feel God pour himself into you in an intimate way which transforms the very inner being of who you are. Trust in Him because He trusts in you.

- **The foundation of the church...what holds us together...is based on a shared task or mission**

I am thinking as I am reading this section that of course we have a shared task and mission and that mission is to share Christ with the world...would I be wrong? No, but the reality is our mission and task can only be accomplished if we gather around and center our lives on the person of Christ. This is important because, as we said earlier, we are all different and the person of Jesus IS our common bond. Every time we pray together, celebrate Mass together, are open to one another, and responsible to one another because of He who binds us together, WE ARE CHURCH...WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.

We are the Body of Christ because we were consecrated in the truth that is Jesus through our Baptism and it is that Baptism that firstly reveals the Paschal Mystery which we will talk about in a little while. So, when we were consecrated, we were no longer made for normal or ordinary use. We are compelled or enlisted if you will to share the life of Christ with those around us. For those of you who have been parents or maybe dealt with a dying parent or sibling, we are compelled, we have no choice, but to act and engage in the duties required of us. We are taken out of what "use to be" into what "needs to be"...because we were called. And when you look at what the Greek word for church is derived from...ekklesia, it means "to be called out of." Our baptism is irrevocable just like becoming a parent is irrevocable. If we think about it, the very best of who we are is received from the grace God gives us when we release ourselves to the strength and guidance only God can give us. Started in Baptism, strengthened in confirmation, and sustained through the Eucharist, we become a via, a pathway by which God reaches through us to those in need or guidance...we cannot receive anyone or touch anyone if we only have a personal relationship with God, we must enter community...we must enter Church!

But having said all this, we must remember that we the church are made up of sinners which finds us being members of a group that often represents the very worst of sin and the very best of mankind. In this book, Carlos Carretto sums it up nicely:

How much I must criticize you, my church and yet how much I love you.

You have made me suffer more than anyone and yet I owe more to you than anyone.

I should like to see you destroyed and yet I need your presence

You have given me much scandal and yet you alone have made me understand holiness.

Never in this world have I seen anything more compromised, more false, never have I touched anything more pure, more generous or more beautiful.

Countless times I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face – and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your arms.

No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you.

Then too – where should I go?

To build another church?

But I could not build one without the same defects, for they are my defects. And again, if I were to build another church, it would be my church, and not Christ's church.

No. I am old enough. I know better.

Tell Father Charles story about the metal dish. How the dish was made from military weapons into something beautiful. How we are like the metal dish, we all start out as sinners, but we are constantly being shaped into something new and beautiful, nourished by the sacraments. In the eyes of God, we are a beautiful mess because no matter who we have been, no matter what we have done, no matter our origins, we are made beautiful and an object of awe in and through Jesus Christ.

We must recognize that all those that are different are a beautiful mess as well where we see beyond our differences and find in them the heart of human dignity – a dignity placed there by God just as much for them as for ourselves. We are called to anoint one another, expressing our love and affection in a meaningful way.

So why go to Church?

- Because it is not good to be alone – Church is walking to God within a community
- To take my rightful place humbly within the family of humanity – when younger, we tried to emerge and to thrust forward our individualism. As we grow more mature, we begin to understand the importance of merging ourselves back into community, into humility.
- Because God calls me there. The search for God is communal. We are to love God and love our neighbor.
- To dispel fantasies about myself – the church helps to re-orient us to our baptismal baseline
- Because ten thousand saints told me so
- To help others and for others to help me – how many of found ourselves on either side of this experience
- To dream with others – What we dream along remains a dream but what we dream with others can become a reality.
- To practice for heaven – We must practice have a universal heart, one of inclusion, understanding and forgiveness.
- For the pure joy of it – how often have you found yourself sitting in Mass thinking the priest is speaking right to you about current things going on in your life and how often do you find meaning in it. How often do you hear your favorite song at church and just light

up and sing it loud? How often do you receive the Eucharist and go back and just week as God pulses through your body? How often do you receive or get a hug just when you need it? We are church...we are a beautiful mess...we are the face of Christ to one another...we experience joy in celebrating Mass and we experience joy in one another.

Chapter 7 – A Spirituality of the Paschal Mystery

The Paschal Mystery is simply put the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are members of the body of Christ and so are united in His Paschal Mystery. But beyond the obvious that we have eternal life, why is this important? Let's look at the Paschal Mystery in a few different ways:

- Life is Greater than Death
- Light is Greater than Darkness
- Forgiveness is Greater than Sin
- Mercy is Greater than Hatred

Rolheiser outlines the Paschal Mystery and compares it to five (5) clear distinct moments:

Good Friday – The loss of life

Easter Sunday – The reception of new life

The Forty Days – A time of readjustments to the new and grieving of the old

Ascension – Letting go of the old and letting it bless you or the refusal to cling on to something

Pentecost – the reception of the new spirit for the new life that one is already living.

The Paschal Mystery can be found in another story told my Father Charles about a blind man called Jarius that in many ways follows the stages listed above (Page 10 in Father Charles book “Born in Beirut.”

Talk about the Paschal Mystery of Marriage – why it is important to see the Paschal Mystery in this (Page 158 in Holy Longing)

Talk about the Paschal Mystery of Forgiveness – Ron Jr. and Ron Sr.

Talk about the Paschal Mystery in Death – Grannie Reaves Story

If you notice in each one of these stories, the Paschal mystery is being conveyed or consummated through another person who is a member of the Body of Christ. It is important for us to see the beauty of the Paschal Mystery in our lives because it is the visible movement of God's providence in our own individual lives...it gives us hope and make our faith more visible. When we recognize the ebb and flow of our life, the Paschal Mystery, our lives become united with the life of Christ and in doing so we can better seek out what the difficulties and sufferings of life are intended “to call us out of” while at the same time calling us in to something anew.

How do you view the role of the church?

How do you view your role in the church?

Where have you experienced the Paschal Mystery in your life? Share your story?

Chapter 8-10 of Holy Longing

God asks only one thing of us...that we act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God. But what does it mean to act justly? How does this relate to social justice and what is social justice? Rolheiser shared a story to explain the difference between charity and social justice **(Share Story)**

Rolheiser states that social justice issues are not so much someone's private sin or some individual's private inadequacy but rather a huge, blind system that is inherently unfair.

Take a few moments in your small groups to discuss this statement. I would like to have a brief forum or roundtable discussion about the validity or strength of this statement.

Do issues related to social justice have anything to do with the loss of the sense of sin?

Both justice and motivation for seeking it must be grounded in the equality of all human persons before God and in our respect for nature as also being God's child.

It is an appeal to the heart that is so deep, so universal, and so moral that no person of good conscience can walk away from it.

But how do we do it?

Four major foundations for social justice

1. God made all people equal in dignity and rights
2. The earth and everything in it belongs equally to everyone
3. All people are co equally responsible with God to help protect the dignity of everybody and everything
4. Physical earth itself has rights and needs to be respected

How do we achieve global social justice? I want to touch on just a few of the ones Rolheiser brought up.

By practicing what we preach. Our moral decision making must match the social justice we seek.

Praying to God for social justice is an integral part of working toward social justice.

We must seek social justice via love and lead people to the truth versus telling them we are right and they are wrong.

We cannot be arrogant, judgmental, or exclusive. We must live a life that reflects that God has already won the battle against evil forces.

Talk about the story of the adultress woman and Jesus telling those who were to stone her to cast the first stone if they have not sinned. We all must be attuned to humility and truth. We must touch those parts of the conscience where the truth still rings true...

Is this getting more difficult as we have a society that is losing the very sense of what sin is today.