

Homily101616

AM I LETTING MYSELF LOSE HEART?

Living can sometimes drain the life right out of us. Am I giving in to discouragement? Am I losing heart?
Have I stopped believing? Stopped trying? Stopped praying? Stopped relying on another's help?

About fifty years ago the Man of La Mancha became a smash Broadway Musical. It captured the idyllic spirit of the early 1960's before the riots, the demonstrations, the drugs and sexual revolutions took place and took hold in our country at the end of the 1960's and early 1970's. Listen to this short soliloquy from the mouth of the man called Don Quixote:

"I have lived nearly fifty years, and I have seen life as it is. Pain, misery, hunger ... cruelty beyond belief. I have heard the singing from taverns and the moans from bundles of filth on the streets. I have been a soldier and seen my comrades fall in battle ... or die more slowly under the lash in Africa. I have held them in my arms at the final moment. These were men who saw life as it is, yet they died despairing. No glory, no gallant last words ... only their eyes filled with confusion, whimpering the question, "Why?" I do not think they asked why they were dying, but why they had lived. When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams — this may be madness. To seek treasure where there is only trash. Too much sanity may be madness — and maddest of all: to see life only as it is, and not as it should be!"

As I began my preparation for my homily I found myself asking a very simple question. Am I losing heart? I mean, personally? With the relentlessly negative presidential campaign and the constant din reminding us of how bad we are and have been, of the worst things men and women are capable of, is my discouragement growing to such an extent that I am beginning to lose heart? And when I say that I mean that am I allowing myself to lose heart, am I surrendering to the desire to lose heart? Have I stopped believing? Have I stopped trying? Have I stopped praying? Stop caring? Stopped hoping? Have I lost faith in the dream that Jesus Christ has brought to earth and laid out before our eyes? Have I stopped asking for help? Have I stopped relying on other's support?

These are all very real questions for me and I am guessing for you as well. You can almost sense the political and social weariness and the growing anger especially in all the various public and social media available to us today. I have noticed how very few political lawn sides are out this year as opposed to normally. It is almost as if we do not want the world to know which candidate we favor. There is an awful lot of finger pointing going on. If the finger pointing doesn't stop soon we're going to run out of fingers. It seems to me that everything has gotten personal. Very personal. All of the above has been in the forefront of my mind recently and as I read the first selection from the Book of Exodus with Old Moses up on the hill top with his hands extended, holding the very staff he used to part the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites I sensed his weariness. He has been at this leadership thing a long time. He is weary. He can hold his arms up, by himself, only so long. He needs others to help him. And this is really important because so many who are fighting the fight down in the valley (or should I say, down in the trenches) are literally looking to him on the hill top and they draw inspiration and encouragement to keep on in the fray. And while his hands are extended they are able to prevail. He is not letting himself lose heart despite his fatigue, despite the battles that are raging all around him. And Moses becomes a sign of the Holy One of God who is to come, the One they will call Messiah and Lord. We call him Jesus of Nazareth. He is, in our faith conviction, the Son of the Most High God. The One He calls Abba, Father.

But Moses needs support himself. There is his brother Aaron, the one who erected the Golden Calf. Remember the Golden Calf? Bad day for Aaron. Bad day for the Israelites. Bad day for God. Bad day for Moses. But God reconstituted Aaron and Moses is able to rely on him now although he let Moses down that other time. And then there is Hur (remember Judah Ben Hur—Judah of the House of Hur). Yes it is the same biblical Jewish family name. A compatriot and friend of Moses. Old Moses can't do it by himself. He will have to rely on a family member and a friend. Sounds rather familiar doesn't it? Us too. Very often. Relying on family members and friends. And then there are times when we become the reliable ones upon whom others rely.

I was texting with my sister recently and she was sharing some old family vignettes that were not familiar to me. I got to thinking and reflecting about her life and how she had a child with very special needs and how she put aside her own health issues and relationship issues to care for him when he could not really care for himself. He died in his early forties. He had been in the hospital over 80 different times. Seemingly all his life. And there she was. Indefatigable. Reliable. Dependable. Proficient. Caring. Loving. Wise. There are a lot of people like my sister in the world who quietly go about the job of bringing great care into the world, who choose not to care what others think about them as they strive to advocate for those in need. Just like the widow in the gospel story today. Relentless and righteous.

I was speaking with a parishioner awhile back who has a family member who was diagnosed with some crippling mental disease and how she is worried about her mom who is the caregiver. Her mom is getting older. She, the daughter, wants to help but she lives far away. There is little that she is able to do. And the powerlessness begins to take its toll. And the temptation arises; we are tempted to lose heart. Tempted to begin to think that nothing matters, Tempted to lose our faith in a God who is good and who truly cares. Tempted to stop praying, what difference does it make? That's part of the temptation that many in our country are experiencing right now. We cannot give in to that temptation. We have to resist even if others cave in. This is the hard part but it is crucially important. It is about the dream that has been unfolded in Jesus Christ who will bring to justice to bear. He asks when the Son of Man comes he will find any faith on the earth? Yes. He will. He will find us. Our faith. Yours and mine. It may seem impossible but it is not. All things are possible—with God. Remember the central song of The Man of La Mancha? It goes like this.

To dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe.
To bear with unbearable sorrow; to run where the brave dare not go
To right the unrightable wrong; and to love pure and chaste from afar
To try when your arms are too weary; To reach the unreachable star.
This is my quest--To follow that star
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far
To fight for the right without question or pause
To be willing to march into hell for that heavenly cause
And I know if I'll only be true to this glorious quest
That my heart will lie peaceful and calm when I'm laid to my rest.
And the world will be better for this
That one man, scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his last ounce of courage
To reach the unreachable star.

It really isn't about Don Quixote de la Mancha. It is about Jesus, you and me. Not so much about then but right now. Let us turn to Eucharist for the sustenance we need.