

Good Friday Reflection

April 14, 2017

I want to begin with a story about a woman named **Kathy**. As the oldest daughter, she promised to her grandmother—before she died--- that she will take care of her grandfather.

Few months after Kathy's grandmother died, her grandfather got sick, and the doctor said that he had only six months to live. She decided to move in to his grandfather's home, and became his full-time caregiver. But, staying with him meant **giving up on the big picture**: quitting her job, selling her house, no longer having the freedom to visit her daughters anytime she wished. And also dropping out of college.

The first days were the hardest. She was not close to her grandfather. The only time he spoke to his grandchildren was to tell them "to be quiet." He was basically a stranger to her. She did not know what to say to him. If they were really going to work through together ---she thought--- they had to make a life for themselves. They planned to participate in their favorite events together. She even decided to go back to school to finish her degree.

Everything changed in their journey together when he had a stroke affecting his ability to speak. Those six months the doctor had given him stretched into five years before he passed away.

On the last hours of Jesus' life, as depicted in the gospel of John, there are important historical and theological points:

In the arrest scene, Jesus recognizes that his passion is something given to him by the Father. It is God's will.

- ✚ Jesus accepts the coming events as ordained by God.
- ✚ Crucifixion, the way he died, was commonly used by the Romans for the worst crimes, and the for the lowest social classes. It was considered so horrible and humiliating that Josephus, a first century Jewish historian called it, "**the most wretched of deaths.**" The "King of the Jews" is executed together with two others, probably criminals, one on each side.

In the arrest scene, Jesus also reveals His Divine nature, when he identifies himself---**I AM** (unique in the gospel of John)

- ✚ Jesus' divinity has the effect of throwing the arresting forces back, and to the ground.

- ✦ He is totally in control of his fate, and needs no help, as we saw on his way to Calvary, the absence of Simon the Cyrenian. Jesus knows that his death is going to be His glorification.

Seeing that Jesus was already dead, the Roman soldiers pierced his side with a lance. **Blood and water** flow out.

- ✦ This is a crucial moment of the entire ministry of Jesus. Now, He has been glorified, his "work" for the Father has been brought to completion.
- ✦ The Beloved Disciple is said to have seen the flow of blood and water, he saw the historical event, but also the theological meaning of the death as both the time of the release of the Spirit, and an atonement through blood.
- ✦ The witness of the Beloved Disciple at the foot of the cross, becomes the first human witness for understanding the death of Jesus: His death gave us the Spirit and took away our sins.
- ✦ As John narrates, this happened ^{on} the day of ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{feast} of Passover, when the lambs were being slaughtered, and not the day of Passover as in the Synoptic gospels.

- ✦ John depicts the death of Jesus against the background of the sacrifice of the Passover lambs. So Jesus becomes the true immolated victim.
- ✦ As John the Baptist----at the beginning of the Gospel---witnessed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, the one taking away the sin of the world.

There is a mysterious scene of dual commitment: The entrusting of the Beloved Disciple to Jesus' Mother, and Jesus' Mother to the Beloved Disciple--(also unique to the Johannine Gospel)

- ✦ Jesus' words: "Woman behold your son," and "behold your mother," involve the establishment of a new relationship between the Mother of Jesus and the Beloved Disciple, an action of considerable significance for the Johannine community, and also for us as believers.
- ✦ In the last minutes of his life, Jesus looks out for the care of his Mother, and also, for the care of the Beloved Disciple, whose presence at the foot of the cross with Mary is certainly intended to call attention to his faithfulness, and his love.
- ✦ Implicitly, the Beloved Disciple is contrasted with Peter, who had denied Jesus 3 times.

The story of Kathy reflects somehow to Jesus' final request to his Mother and to the Beloved Disciple. After Kathy's grandfather died, she sat on the

sofa in the living room at her grandfather's home for a last time. The view out the window was the same, but she was different. She became a caregiver in order to keep a promise. What she discovered was the joy of getting to know and love her grandfather, and letting him get to know and love her. Can you imagine, how deep, and meaningful this grandfather--- granddaughter relationship became, that He lasted 5 years instead of 6 months, as the doctor had said? More important, she came to see God's hand in her life, in a way that she showed her faithfulness, and love to her grandfather.

Saying Yes to what God our Father asks of us, opens up possibilities beyond what we may dream. Jesus, and also Kathy, understood the big picture.

I want to end with a quote from **Bishop Ketteler**, our Founder:

“Works of **love** are the most convincing arguments. When others see that with us, is the home of active Christian **love** that is always ready to aid our suffering, those needy brothers and sisters, only then, the truth of our **faith will be recognized.**”