

Eastern Point
Fifth Sunday of Lent
Reflection
Joannie Cassidy, SSJ
March 21, 2021

Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, bears much fruit.”

This is the soul-stirring secret to life, “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Jesus was using this as a metaphor for what would happen to him and, ultimately, what happens to us. Our death and our life are interconnected. Something dies, but something new is born. This is why the chaos of our times is, in a costly and strange way, beckoning us to hope; to see and lean into the God who is creating and inviting us to new life. Out of chaos, out of suffering, new life and new ways of being are unearthed in us. In these times that may seem like a breakdown, can also be seen as a breakthrough, if we recognize a new pattern of life struggling to emerge.

A year has passed since we have been tossed about in the throes and waves of the pandemic. We have known the grace of hands that have reached out to carry and console, to offer courage and compassion to those who have needed it. We have seen humanity rise with each breath inward and fall with every exhale outward, stretching their hands in generosity and mercy. In the midst of oppression, we have seen hands that have stretched across city streets to hold and heal the suffering of horrid acts of racism and discrimination. We have seen the hands that have stretched to reach the multitudes suffering and those who lost loved ones from Covid- 19. And after months of stay at home and quarantine, we have held the cry of Earth as she struggles to breathe and survive, watching the air and water become a little clearer, and the soil renewed.

Abraham Heschel says that, “Eternal life does not grow away from us; it is planted within us growing beyond us.” Our life, our eternal life has already begun. Suffering is the place where our humanity meets the Divine. Dying to self, calls for inner transformation, real reflection and self- emptying.

I have met suffering and divine love. When I was in El Paso, I met Fernando. He had just come off the ICE bus with his two daughter, tired worn. Maria, two years old, held by a pouch on his back, was peering over his shoulder. Angelina, his older daughter, was carried by his two hands in a car seat in front of him. Nine years old, Angelina, did not have the use of her legs. I went over to see if I could help. He nodded and then spoke. “No...No Mi hijas, la llevo por amore. My daughters, I carry them out of love. I let go of all. My hijas, I carry and I suffer for them out of great love.” It was evident that Fernando, in his fragility suffering and, leaned into God for strength. It was from this deep place that even in struggle, uncertainly and chaos, Fernando let go of all. His own fears, doubts and sufferings were let go into the promise of a new life. Mi hijas...Las llevo por amor. I carry them out of love for new life.

At the end of this Lenten Season, we are offered once again an invitation to a turning and returning to receptivity and attentiveness to God and God’s invitations to let go. As Thomas Merton would put it, “to return to the point of pure truth, to return to the center which is divine love.”

Suggestions for Prayer:

Letting go of that to which we hold so tightly, letting go of those things that we think we cannot live without, letting go of those things that we are convinced are necessary to live or perceive will satisfy. God desires wholeness; letting go of isolated existence for the sake of deeper union. What is the grain of wheat that needs to be let go of for the sake of deeper union with God? What are the things that if lost, we are sure we would just die? Where is God calling us to self-empty and carry out of love? Maybe those are the very places waiting to bear much fruit, where the invitation for transformation lies.

(Below is a painting by Joannie Cassidy SSJ, entitled *Joseph the Refugee* that she just finished. It was inspired by her prayer and reflection on Fernando and his two daughters.)



I end this reflection by sharing a poem. I wrote at a time when I needed to hear, that out of chaos, out of suffering, the promise of new life, healing and new ways of being will be unearthed in us.

Song of the Soul

Finally,

I exhale, letting go

I hear you,

“Unfurl ever more fully and freely

so others will know my love.”

Like leaves on a tree soaring in the wind,

I fall cascading downward into the depths

to the cadence of Gabriele’s Oboe

and rise to the Spirit’s Alleluia Chorus of freedom.

It is here where the resonance of my heart resides.

The echo of suffering and joy reverberates

Becoming the song of my soul

Where true union

with you

abides.

Joannie Cassidy, SSJ

Song Suggestion: *Return Again* by Shaina Noll



Picture by Joannie Cassidy,SSJ

