

## DSC CLOSING MASS HOMILY

Several days ago, I prepared my words for you this evening. With the sudden death of our Sister Nadine Sheehan, I have some extemporaneous thoughts to share with you about her new Life with us . . . In the *Letter to the Hebrews*, the author writes of the “cloud of witnesses that surrounds us” – in other words, the communion of saints! The Greek word used for “cloud of witnesses” refers to the people in a stadium who are cheering on the runners. Now, Sister Nadine is in the stadium that we call “heaven” and she is cheering us on as we come to the ending of our Dominican Sisters Conference and go out to meet the future.

Now, here are the words I have prepared:

A number of years ago, one of our sisters attended a week-long seminar on liturgy and was both moved and shaken by the presentation on the Eucharist. The lecturer said that if we knew what we were really doing – what we were entering into – as we approached the Eucharist, we would tremble and shake.

Annie Dillard has similar words on going to church/liturgy in “Teaching a Stone to Talk” . . . She writes:

“Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? . . . It is madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.”

These thoughts come to me this afternoon because the passage we have just heard from the Gospel of John is a very beautiful one that has the power to take us “to where we can never return” IF it is taken seriously. If not, then these words of Jesus could merely warm our hearts and give us a lovely, comfortable feeling about our life in God but not do much else. We have just heard a very intense prayer: “consecrate them in truth” – which, I suggest, is not a magical formula – but rather means “to be drenched in.” Jesus is praying: drench them in holiness, drench them in wholeness so that through them all may experience the love of God and draw close in “oneness.”

In this passage, John invites us into a future where “all are one” – when all are brought into a “knowing” of God – not a reciting of dogmatic propositions –but rather into the experience of love and of being loved. We need to be clear that the oneness in John’s gospel is a “oneness” of unity not of uniformity. We can see this in the lived experience of those in the Johannine community who were drawn into a life of intimacy with God and knew that their lives were changed forever. At the same time, they were always in communion with the other churches founded by the Twelve, by the women and by Paul. Today, as then, we are called to a unity that embraces “a vibrant, stunning diversity.” (Virginia Hebers, *In Our Own Words*, p. 7)

And was this not the wisdom of Mother Raymond and the Mothers General who gathered in San Rafael in 1935? What started as a discussion of uniformity in religious life evolved into a celebration of individual spirits carrying on the Dominican mission of preaching the Word of God to the world.

During these past days, we, the descendants of those prophetic spirits, have gathered to talk and reflect on our global reality and the Word needing to be preached, we have spoken of futuring our charism, of listening to and engaging in the justice reports, of the life emerging from Dominican Women Afire and we have met in Open Space!

The challenges are clear: in the following of Jesus, we are not to be co-opted by the values and mores of the world and of our contemporary society. We are to be counter-cultural – on the margins – speaking a prophetic word to the “world” of what it would be like if God was really in charge. We are called to wash feet, to give service devoid of domination . . . We are to call on the Paraclete – the Holy Spirit who counsels us in all things. We are to cling to the vine that nourishes our branches as we grow and silently bear fruit. . . all for the life of the world.

Well, after hearing what I’ve just said, my New Testament professor at Fordham would say: SO WHAT? What are the real-life implications of this consecration – of this “drenching” into a vibrant, stunning diversity? In other words, how do we live in “truth” and what consequences does that have for living our four pillars of prayer, study, service and community – in a changing and evolving world and in a changing and evolving Dominican life? To what is the waking god drawing us out to?

From my perspective, the rousing refrain of Laudare, Benedicere, Predicare says it all! I would suggest that during these past days we have been standing within our four pillars and also between the narrative of Dominican life today and tomorrow. It is clear that we are called to:

Embrace with grace the marketplace,  
Embrace the world not of this world,  
Embrace the mission with compassion  
To preach the Word to the world.

As these days of meetings come to an end, we join together at this Eucharist (together with our life preservers!) and pray that as we embrace this vision of Dominican Christian life we experience Sister Nadine cheering us on from the stadium and saying to us:

YES, Now is the time! AND  
YOU/We are the space for the Holy to rise in our midst!

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