

*“As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”*

### DANDELION SPIRITUALITY

Sometimes there come into our lives events which challenge our faith and our relationship to God. We may get to the point where we ask ourselves, do I trust God. Do I know God? Is God really there for me? Am I afraid of God? We need to know how to answer those questions. In the gospel reading for today, Jesus is surely facing an event that would challenge anyone's faith. He is going to his death in a particularly cruel way. One of his trusted companions, Judas, is going out to betray him which unstoppably starts the process. And yet Jesus announces that, “Now is the son of man glorified.” Glorified? What kind of glory is it that you are beaten, tortured, nailed to a cross as a common criminal, mocked and humiliated? Well, Jesus evidently sees this in a different way. He sees this event as a gift from the Father which he is going to embrace while trusting in the Father. Not that he didn't try to refuse having to go through this event - but out of love for us, he, in the end, embraced it. And by doing so won the great victory over the forces of darkness and defeated even death itself.

There is a great lesson for us here since we are called to be imitators of Christ in responding to life's events. Jesus also tells us: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” Thus we too can defeat the forces of darkness in our lives and that is the goal of our spiritual life. To see how we, you and I, might do this, let's consider what can be called dandelion spirituality. [Jim Beckman]

Have you noticed some of the lawns in our town have lately sprouted a good crop of dandelions? And for you who have/have had little kids, what comes to mind? Little kids love to pick those dandelions and present them as a gift to their parents. Let's get specific. We envision a little boy and his mom and the dandelions. Being little the boy cannot pick the dandelions very deftly. As he goes from plant to plant pulling off the flowers, he winds up mutilating some of them ending up with a handful of yellow stuff mixed with green stuff. Still the little guy is proud of his deed and runs to give the flowers to mom. And what does mom do? Does she say ‘look at the mess you're making. Take them to the garbage and get rid of them.’? No, she accepts the gift and more than that. She goes and gets one of her special flower bowls and lovingly arranges those mutilated flowers in water. She then places the bowl in a place of honor either in a window sill or at the center of

the dining table. Where we might see a mutilated mess, mom sees an act of love and honors it appropriately.

So this is dandelion spirituality. To see how this works in our lives, let's interpret it. A lot of us would put ourselves as the little boy and the mom as God. We take out gifts, talents, events in our lives, imperfect and mutilated as they might be, and present them to God. We then hope that God will receive them and transform them into something good, something heavenly. But there is another way to look at this. We are the mom and Jesus is the little child presenting the events in our lives to us. Think about that! Even events or circumstances that we judge are bad or distasteful, are gifts presented to us by Jesus. We are to be the receptive mother who embraces these things, lovingly attends them, and puts them in a place of honor before God. To embrace these 'gifts' means that we don't passively accept them, but we do our best to arrange them to be presentable. If it is an illness, we get and follow the medical and psychological help. If it is a relationship problem, we seek counseling as needed. If it is a loss we try to repair it the best we can and then present it to God. The greatest example of this in my family's life was Joan's action in our son Mike's accident and injuries and its aftermath. She embraced that tragic event and dedicated herself to his recovery. And he did recover and that event, sad as it was, changed our family's life for the better. I'm sure that that is Joan's premiere gift to God at this very moment.

It may seem strange to look at ourselves accepting even bad events in our lives as gifts from Jesus, but to me as I reflect upon it, it makes sense. We are placing a lot of trust in God to think this way, but God is in a love relationship with us in our everyday lives and thus wills what is the good for us. We heard in the second reading: "God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God."

As I said, it takes a lot of trust to follow this type of spirituality. It takes a lot of faith to allow God to be with us in our trials and trust that it will be good in the end. But what is the alternative? When events come into our lives, particularly bad events, do we practice resignation and say well those are the cards I have been dealt and resentfully accept them? If so we are being a fatalist, not a person of faith. Henri Nouwen tells us that "fatalism is the attitude that makes us live as passive victims of external circumstances beyond our control." We may ask God for help but more as a last resort and despair than trust. When we are in this state the

world is a dark and fearsome place and we have a hard time believing that God is in control.

On the other hand we can choose to be a person of faith. God has given all of us the gift of faith and we need to use it. That's what dandelion spirituality is all about. Henri Nouwen also tells us that "faith is the deep trust that God's love is stronger than all the anonymous powers of the world and can transform us from victims of darkness into servants of light." He also says that part of our spiritual journey is to identify the many ways in which we think, speak, or act with fatalism and step by step to convert them into moments of faith. This movement from fatalism to faith is the movement that will remove the cold darkness from our hearts and transform us into people who trust in the power of love. "God will wipe every tear from their eyes and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.

As we practice this dandelion spirituality and accept all the events of our lives as gifts from Jesus to present to the Father, then we will be free to live the grateful life. True spiritual gratitude embraces all of our past, the good as well as the bad events, the joyful as well as the sad moments. From the spot where we stand right now, everything that took place in our past brought us to this place and we want to remember all of it as part of God's guidance. It doesn't mean that all that happened was good, but it does mean that even the bad didn't happen outside the loving presence of God. Just as Jesus' suffering brought him to the way of glory, so also for us, if we place our trust in God, our lives will bring us to our place of glory.