

I love the season after Pentecost, now that we comprehend the Trinity!, I love that it is called ordinary time which seems so ironic somehow and is certainly not meant to call for complacency!

In fact this is ordinary time, in which nothing is ordinary at least not if we have indeed been present for the last 7 months of annunciation, incarnation, resurrection, ascension and most recently sanctification in the recognition of the Trinity!

Rather our task this season of Pentecost is to appreciate the sacramentality of creation, all aspects of life given...to appreciate and mark the grace of God. This is to participate in the trinitarian process of creation, redemption, and sanctification. Extraordinary in and of itself and beyond measure!

This task of uncovering the ordinary layers of life to expose the extraordinary and to lift them to God is often hampered by our humanness, our taking it for grantedness. Our demons, be they jealousies, addictions, compulsions, obsessions, depression, disappointments, despair, or other illnesses prevent us the full Christian participation, the fullest communion, the fullest freedom...

And that leads us to a man called Legion, filled with demons. Raging against the night! We are told that Legion simply could not escape these voices which keep us from God. He somehow yearned for something holier and freer. His physical escapes from shackles foreshadowed a greater escape from bondage. Yet he was objectified, treated as a problem to be boxed in.

Enter Jesus the Christ...Demons are cast out by the love of Christ and Legion becomes yet another sacred story as he is sent back to similarly transform the community.

Love offered by Jesus to Legion, transformed an objectified demoniac into a human for whom we ought to have compassion. We are Legion. We live our lives bombarded by anxieties. Yet we who are Baptized into the Body of Christ have been washed with the waters of dignity and devotion which triumph over denigration and oppression.

Jesus always comes to remind us to be anxious for nothing. Grace overcomes despair. Love transforms fear into kindness and compassion.

This transforming love which casts out fear was nowhere more apparent than in the stories told by Holocaust survivors. One of my favorites was in a book made into the movie: *Playing For Time* by Fania Fenelon. Vanessa Redgrave is recognized by the Nazis as an accomplished musician so she and a small group of other female musicians find refuge in playing for their captors. A completely inhumane situation was interrupted by holy humanness. Music became the redeeming hope of survival, the momentary casting out of demoniacs. Music was the balm of hope transforming horrifying fear of death into eternal moments of hope.

How many of you have Never been anxious? I am expecting to see no hands.

It is, I believe, a feeling we have all experienced. At some point in our lives we have all received a diagnosis either literally or figuratively of pervasive anxiety disorder. Some of us and certainly some of our loved ones have experienced a more pathological form of anxiety, depression or addiction.

The question presented by the readings today is at least: Where is God when we are anxious?

And the answer would appear to be: Everywhere in creation...calling your name...offering a balm to heal the sin sick soul.

Deep calls to deep whenever our souls are heavy and burdened.

For Elijah God was in the silence.

Jesus calls to each of us in our anxiety. As those obsessive tapes play in our heads, Jesus offers us a balm. There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul

What is the balm? The short answer is love.

The longer answer is that there are spaces in creation which offer love in various ways, albeit often obscured by sin, by demons, by greed and oppression.

I think of pastoral theology and pastoral care when I read the story of Legion. I think of all the experiences in my life lived or observed which have provided that pastoral calm...that pastoral hope which is promised.

For me, when anxious I think of art and poetry and music. I think of Beethoven's 6th symphony his Pastoral Symphony, when I first learned what pastoral meant. I think of Rembrandt's head of Christ and ponder where the light comes from. I think of Mary Oliver's poetry which exposes the ordinary for its extraordinariness by paying attention, acute attention. I think of the Bible, filled with poetry and literature and story which offer blessed assurance in trying times.

I also think of psalm 42 As the deer longs for the water brooks, so longs my soul for you O God.

Its counter lamenting refrain: Why are you so full of heaviness, why are you so disquieted within me?

This lamentation is universal. We have all felt heavy, burdened, disquieted as Legion was. And it at those times we know that we may give our burdens to Jesus. Easier said than done.

But the psalms teach us and psalms 42 and 43 in particular that the first step is to cry out, the second step is to acknowledge our yearning for the stillness and peace of God, and the third is to develop practices which actually calm our demons and restore us to God.

Recently, I was involved in my monthly group spiritual direction session with three colleagues, and while I cannot divulge details, it is safe to say that all of us were struggling with heightened anxiety for various reasons. In what was a remarkable and serendipitous moment Walter Berry's poem *The Peace of Wild Things* came to me and I mentioned it, I remembered only parts of it, each other member proceeded to fill in the missing lines
we all concluded that it was like psalm 42 a life line in times of despair and written on our hearts.

It was and is for me as are the other pastoral pieces mentioned a still calm space of wisdom as though poured onto a flaming issue of despair. Despair smolders and dissipates, love abides, solid creative beauty holds us, and the voices are integrated by the waters of baptism.

After all Elijah testifies to the fact that God is not in the wind the earthquake nor the fire. God is in the silence, sheer silence, the language of God.
By the brook, in the depth of the woods, gazing at snow glistening in a sunlit valley, listening to a newborn sleep in your arms. Create your own image which soothes and practice it.

God's silence melts anxiety.
God's silence irradiates the holy, the extraordinary
The peace of wild things or the extraordinariness of ordinary things
Anxiety, demons, are quelled like a storm by the love of God

The Peace of Wild Things
[Wendell Berry](#)

Listen
When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

O Lord make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy name, for you never fail to help...

Lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, come into the presence of still water, like the deer longs for...

May we with our own demons long for the waters of baptism which cleanse and heal. They are in our soul and always will be.