

REFLECTION
BICENTENNIAL FAMILY LITURGY
SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2009
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We Sisters of Charity and Associates – are delighted and grateful that you ... our family members are here to help us celebrate 200 years of Elizabeth Ann Seton's **Legacy of Charity!**

A couple of months ago I was asked to prepare this reflection ...

and I said "Yes"... **well before – I looked up the readings for the day.**

When I did look up the readings ... I thought "GREAT!" ... This is one of the last gospel readings

I'd choose to prepare a reflection on ... and **especially in light what we're celebrating.**

The wrath of God – I'd rather not even think about that ... much less reflect on publicly ...

and here it is – the story of the Jesus ...

being more than infuriated with the Wall Street traders, buyers and sellers of his day –

in first century Jerusalem – in violation of the law of God - and the spirit of law of God!

Perhaps my resistance reflects my own discomfort in the face of bald anger ...

and even my anger at the Wall Street "den of thieves" of today ...

with their 'casino economy' ...and the catastrophic risks they have left for all of us to bear.'

I'm sure it wasn't a pretty sight that day in the Temple ...

and I suspect many of the people there ... and many of us here – had we been there ...

would have scrambled behind any nearby pillars – **just for safety.**

I found myself wondering though ... what happened to each of the money-changers

who, if conscious at all – couldn't help but feel the wrath of God ...

in the actions and words of Jesus.

Did the encounter change them?

Did it open their eyes – and more importantly – their hearts ...

to the moral consequences of their **philosophy and practice** of greed

where profit and self-interest was put above the good of the common people?

Jesus' anger might seem so uncharacteristic as we have come **to know** him

through scripture and tradition ... this being only one story among so very many others ...

or ... as we have come **to believe** who this Jesus is in our lives ... out of our own

experience of – and need for intimacy – for compassion – for mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus knew the law which taught him

to respect the Temple – the house of God – and – to respect the people of God.

He believed, as the Psalmist says ... **'the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul'** ...

and He trusted that **'the decrees of the Lord were trustworthy ... giving wisdom to the simple.'**

And beyond the letter of the law ... Jesus embraced that spirit of the law ...

which allowed him to act with boldness that day in the temple ...

in the face of the unconscious actions of the sellers and buyers ... **actions**

- that reduced life to the ego-satisfaction of making a deal – at the expense of another;

- that dismissed the generosity of God in favor of self-interest and unbridled greed;
- that filled one's bag of coins – for the sake of delusional security or imaginary status ...
 and ... all this – in the very place built for people to come and worship their God
 in hopes that God would transform lives.

We know that the ego – **in its unconsciousness** – **is always wanting more** ... and more ... and more ...
 and then we discover that “more” is never enough
 and **only blinds us to the Christian virtue of sharing**.
 That's what Jesus in his anger was most concerned about.

Would it have been a different scene ... had the buying and selling been
 to benefit the poor, the lepers, the widows, the children?
 We may never know. But we can well imagine ... **that if service had been the motivating factor**,
 the energy and spirit enveloping the Temple that day
 would have **honored the law ... and fulfilled the spirit of the law**.

Everyone of us in this chapel has experienced anger ...
 not only in others ... but in ourselves as well.
 And I dare say ... each of us does know when the anger leads to some kind of transformation ...
and when it does not.

We must ask ourselves in the face of our own anger ... **where it is coming from?** **and why?**
 Is it for the sake of the kingdom – the greater good? ...
 or ... is it about self justification or self righteousness or simply self aggrandizement?
 Does it rise out of our **fidelity and commitment** to our God, who reminds us in the first reading ...
“I am your God and you shall have no other gods besides me”
 Or ... does it rise out of being thwarted in our ego-driven expectations and desires –
 always for more – for that which is deemed better – or better yet, the best –
 and ... **at the expense of the common good – or the good of another?**

Medical Doctor and author Rachel Naomi Remen says ... (Rachel Naomi Remen. Kitchen Table Wisdom. p. 89)
**“Sometimes we become married to our expectations... (our false gods)
 and miss a love affair with life.”... (our real and only God)**

Anger rises when we are facing a frustrating or stressful situation ...

- when there is a gap between what we need or want and what we are getting
- or when we experience a sense of loss of one sort or another.

Jesus experienced that gap and vented his anger when
 he observed the false gods being honored in the house of his Father.
 Jesus had reason enough to vent that day. His anger was **more than purposeful** ...
 but he did not let the anger color all his encounters and relationships before or after this occasion.
 His anger did not define him ...
allowing no room for love or compassion ... much less forgiveness or peace.

As I was reflecting on the grace of this gospel story ... I recalled another story I once heard –

... A NATIVE AMERICAN STORY ...

A certain Native American Grandfather was talking to his grandchild about how he felt.

He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving compassionate one."

His wide-eyed grandchild asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart, Grandfather?"

The grandfather answered, "**The one I feed.**"

And I wonder about Elizabeth Seton ... whose legacy of Charity we focus on today ...

What would she have told her children ... or her grandchildren had she lived that long ...
or her sisters in community? ... **Which wolf did she feed?**

No doubt, Elizabeth experienced many occasions in which, I well suspect, she felt anger ...

- when her mother died ... and her father was absent for long periods of time;
- when her beloved Will died – leaving her with five young children to raise;
(At one point she admitted her frustrations with her oldest, Anna Maria whose "fiery temper" was like her own.)

Did she feel anger

- when she experienced the waves of religious bigotry in her decision to become Catholic?
- when she experienced tension within herself or among her sisters in the fledgling community?
- in her relationship with her Episcopal Pastor in NY and some of her priest superiors in Baltimore and Emmitsburg who seemed **not to understand** her heart and soul ... and her need to care for her children?

Her anger never defined her ... for we know full well of her constant effort to remain faithful ...
to meeting her grace – and feeding the compassionate wolf within her ...

This was most **evident** in her favorite prayer ...

*"O God, into whatever state of blindness or absurdity I may fall,
in whatever state of disorder my faith may be,
if I seek you in the simplicity of my heart I will surely find you."*

Perhaps that is the "**wisdom of the simple**" the psalmist was referring to in today's responsorial psalm.

So ... I invite each one of us here in our chapel this afternoon, celebrating

Elizabeth Seton's legacy of Charity ... a **legacy of loving ... with compassion**

that ... **as we praise, give thanks, and receive** ... the **one and only God** of our lives ...

we ask Jesus to drive out all our other false gods – gods that we **so blindly** cling to ...

... gods that feed our **angry wolf** within ...

the gods of control – greed – status-seeking – image – or power ..

And ... let us beg God to help us **surrender to the Word of God** and **the Spirit of the Word** ...
which – the psalmist reminds us ... is

'more precious than gold ... and stronger than death.'

It is up to each one of us to keep asking ourselves ... **which wolf in my heart do I feed?**

We know which one Jesus fed ... and we know which one Elizabeth fed!

As we proclaim our creed together in a minute or two ... let it be a testimony of our desire ...

to witness consciously to live the legacy of charity ...

by being **compassionate, forgiving and loving people of God** –

this very hour – this day – this week – **this anniversary year!**