28 B 2024

Rabbi Abraham Heschel, author of books on the lives of Old Testament Prophets, once had said that only three things are necessary for us to connect with God: God’s willingness to love us, the capacity of the human person to receive that love, and a moment in which those two realities can meet. He insisted that there is not a time in our lives when any one of those three things is missing. God is always loving us. We are always capable of receiving God’s love. There is always a moment in which we and God can connect.

But at the same time connecting with God is challenging and elusive. That’s what today’s Gospel is about. All three things that are necessary are there. Jesus is willing. He loves the person. He offers him discipleship. The person is open. God’s law is written on his heart. The moment is there, when they meet. And nothing happens. How is this possible? The simple answer: something else got in the way. Whatever got in the way, the person was distracted from what Jesus was offering, what the person so deeply desired. Such a tragedy. A tragedy in which we can relate.

I believe that the test of a living spirituality is when we interact with the contemporary world, whether it be the chaos and contentiousness of feudal 13th century Assisi, or the incivility and divisiveness of our present democracy. Franciscan spirituality can awaken a vision of hope amid the challenges we face. Daily reflection and formation sessions ought to assist us—always to “begin again”—if we are to respond adequately to a rapidly changing environment. Let us endeavor to pray to the Holy Spirit for the gift of wisdom, to integrate our ways with God’s ways as God relates to the world.

God expects us to build a better world, more fraternal and Gospel-oriented. So, we give of ourselves, our time and effort. We become involved. We might even become involved politically to work against injustice and inequality. We take up causes that can evoke change and reform.

I remember visiting the children preparing for First Holy Communion. It was art class and the children were drawing. Looking over my shoulder one little girl was very hard at work. I asked what she was drawing: “I’m drawing a picture of God.” I responded as gently as I could that nobody knows what God looks like. Not missing a beat, she replied: “They will when I’m through!”

Lively faith can give birth to lively fraternities, theology can enrich understanding, and understanding can reveal experiences of the holy. Like St Francis, we need to treasure the faith that has nurtured us, recognizing the insights that inspire us, to bring them forth for a better tomorrow. Like St Clare, to forge new paths of spirituality, affecting the role of women. And like St Bonaventure, to infuse human and divine love by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, into the challenges of apostolate and contemplation. As the Christ of the Cross of San Damiano informed Francis that our world and our lives need repair, our fraternities need fresh and inspiring vision to move apathy to empathy, to work for transformation for the healing of relationships with our church, our nation, and our environment.