

24<sup>th</sup> Sunday 2016

What's going on? Are you wondering why I took off my robes and am dressed in black? Are you wondering why I memorized the Gospel? This is a very powerful gospel and I wanted to tell it simply and starkly without fine robes. And it is the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. It is a day of memory. It is a day when we are reminded of the terrible events that so profoundly affected our country and really the whole world. Yesterday I made my first pilgrimage to the site of 9/11 to see the memorial and remember those who gave their lives and lost their lives. It goes without saying that the experience was moving beyond words. Seeing the names of those who died inscribed in the memorial around the flowing waters, made me realize that this was a microcosm of the whole world. Names of every nationality and I imagine of every faith. I was particularly moved by the names of women who were coupled with "and their unborn child".

Memory. It is what links us to our past and our present and creates the hope of the future. But when memory fails as we get older, it helps that there is someone to "remind" us. And even God needs reminding! In today's scripture from the book of Exodus, Moses has to remind God of his faithfulness, remind God of the promises that God has made to his people. You can hear the voice of Moses saying " God, don't you remember? Don't you remember your covenant? Don't you remember the promises you made to Israel? Can a mother forget the child nursing at her breast? Do I need to remind you that you are Mother and Father to us all? And God does remember. God has a change of heart.

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds the tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees as well that God is like the father in the story

who is prodigal, lavish in his forgiveness. But don't forget! Somewhere in the story is the mother who would have modeled a mother's unconditional love for her husband. I remember so well a family Mass in Boston many years ago when we told the story with a mother and her two sons. (It just so happened that I had lunch with that very same mother/ now grandmother who was caring for her grandchild and came to visit me!) In the story both sons need to be re-minded of how unconditionally they are loved. "Everything I have is yours but we had to rejoice since your brother was dead and is now alive, was lost and now is found.

The other reason I decided to do the Gospel this way was to illustrate the power of gesture. We speak and communicate not only with words but with our bodies, with gesture. You saw me with arms folded across my chest when angry, reaching out to the older son in a gesture of pleading, throwing my arms around the younger son when he is lost. As Catholics, we learn to pray with gesture when we make the sign of the cross. We don't just say the words but we use the gestures to express outwardly what we feel inside.

The most ancient posture of Judeo-Christian Prayer was arms and hands raised and open, symbolizing openness and vulnerability before God. It's called the "orans" or prayer posture. These days you only see the priest praying this way but in the early centuries the whole community prayed this way. At least in the Our Father, we open our hands. Here we join hands. In my former parish for the family Mass we always prayed the Our Father with gestures so that we could feel the movement towards God and towards each other. If you don't mind, I'd like to teach you these gestures and perhaps for our Our Father today you could join me.

(Usually accompanying Chant version of the Our Father)

Our Father who are in heaven, Hallowed by thy name  
(both hands/arms are raised up slowly reaching “heavenward”  
Thy Kingdom Come (Both hands/arms open to their respective  
sides)  
Thy Will be done (a slight bow of the head)  
On earth/ Hands cross  
As it is in heaven/ Arms open to the sides at mid-level  
Give us this day our daily bread (hands are joined in a ‘begging’  
gesture and lifted up  
And forgive us our trespasses ( hands cover the face and are  
lowered slowly)  
As we forgive those who trespass against us (hands and arms  
open up to the sides)  
And lead us not into temptation (hands are brought up from  
the side to cover the face with palms facing out  
But deliver us from evil/ ( Hands are lowered to mid level  
For yours is the kingdom.... ( arms are lifted up on both sides  
and then brought down as the chant finishes.

Memory and Gesture. Mind and Body. Our human way of  
connecting with past and present and creating a future  
together. In this Eucharist God is re-membering us as we  
remember God’s faithfulness. Yesterday Today and Forever.