

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT, APRIL 6, 2014

WHEN JESUS HEARD THAT LAZARUS WAS ILL HE SAID: "THIS ILLNESS IS NOT TO END IN DEATH, BUT IS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, THAT THE SON OF GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH IT"

LET US BEGIN WITH THE STORY OF THE "EGGS"....

EGGS

IN MY GRANDMOTHER RACHEL'S KITCHEN, NOTHING WAS EVER WASTED.

WHEN SHE WAS A YOUNG WIFE IN RUSSIA, THERE WAS NOT ALWAYS FOOD ENOUGH, AND SOMETIMES THE FAMILY WENT HUNGRY. HER HUSBAND WAS THE RABBI, AND SO WHATEVER FOOD THEY HAD WAS ALWAYS SHARED WITH OTHERS WHO HAD LESS, AND SHE HAD BECOME SKILLED AT MAKING WHAT THEY HAD GO A LONG WAY.

IT HAD NOT BEEN EASY.

PERHAPS THIS IS WHY, IN AMERICA, MY GRANDMOTHER'S KITCHEN WAS OVERFLOWING WITH FOOD. HERE IN THIS COUNTRY SHE RAISED HER DAUGHTERS TO KEEP AN EXTRA BOX AND BOTTLE UNOPENED IN THE PANTRY FOR EVERY BOTTLE AND BOX THAT WAS IN USE. ALTHOUGH SHE DIED BEFORE I WAS BORN, I WAS RAISED BY HER ELDEST DAUGHTER TO DO THIS SAME THING. ABSENTMINDED AS I AM, I OFTEN FIND I HAVE ACCUMULATED TWO OR EVEN THREE EXTRAS OF ANYTHING IN MY HOUSE.

BUT THIS ABUNDANCE DID NOT MEAN THAT THINGS WERE TO BE WASTED. EVERYTHING WAS ALWAYS USED TO THE FULL.

EVEN THE TEA BAGS WERE USED TWICE.

THERE IS A FAMILY STORY TOLD ABOUT MY GRANDMOTHER'S ICEBOX THAT MAY NOT BE TRUE, BUT THEN AGAIN, PERHAPS IT IS. I HAVE HEARD IT EVER SINCE I WAS SMALL. GRANDMAS'S ICEBOX WAS THE DEEP SOURCE OF A TRULY AMAZING OUTPOURING OF GOODNESS. IT WAS ALWAYS FULL TO THE VERY EDGES EVERY SHELF, EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY WAS PUT TO USE. OCCASIONLLY WHEN SOMEONE, USUALLY A CHILD, OPENED IT WITHOUT SUFFICIENT CAUTION, AN EGG WOULD FALL OUT AND BREAK ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR. MY GRANDMOTHER'S RESPONSE WAS ALWAYS THE SAME. SHE WOULD LOOK AT THE BROKEN EGG WITH SATISFACTION. "AHA", SHE WOULD SAY, "TODAY WE HAVE A SPONGE CAKE!"

BEFRIENDING LIFE IS NOT ALWAYS ABOUT HAVING THINGS YOUR OWN WAY. LIFE IS IMPERMANENT AND FULL OF BROKEN EGGS. BUT WHAT IS TRUE OF EGGS IS EVEN MORE TRUE OF PAIN AND LOSS AND SUFFERING. CERTAIN THINGS ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO BE WASTED. WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN, JUST AFTER THE DOCTOR CAME AND INFORMED ME THAT I HAD A DISEASE (CHROME'S DISEASE) THAT NO ONE KNEW HOW TO CURE, MY MOTHER HAD REMINDED ME OF THIS. I HAD TURNED TOWARD HER IN SHOCK, BUT SHE DID NOT CUDDLE OR SOOTHE. INSTEAD SHE REACHED OUT AND TOOK ME BY THE HAND.

"WE WILL MAKE A SPONGE CAKE," SHE TOLD ME FIRMLY. IT HAS TAKEN MANY YEARS TO FIND THE RECIPE, THE ONE THAT IS MY OWN, BUT I

KNEW IN THAT MOMENT THIS WAS WHAT I NEEDED TO DO.

LIFE WASTES NOTHING. OVER AND OVER AGAIN EVERY MOLECULE THAT HAS EVER BEEN IS GATHERED UP BY THE HAND OF LIFE TO BE RESHAPED INTO YET ANOTHER FORM. THE MOLECULES IN YOU AND ME AND INDEED IN EVERYONE ARE SECOND HAND, BORROWED FOR THE OCCASION AND RETURNED WHEN OUTGROWN. HOW STRANGE TO THINK THAT GREAT PAIN MAY BE IMPERMANENT. SOMETHING IN US ALL SEEMS TO WANT TO CARVE IT IN GRANITE, AS IF ONLY THIS WOULD DO FULL HONOR TO ITS TERRIBLE SIGNIFICANCE. BUT EVEN PAIN IS BLESSED WITH IMPERMANENCE; SLOWLY, DROP BY DROP, IT MAY BE WORN AWAY UNTIL EVEN THE MOST DEVOTED SEARCHERS CANNOT FIND IT UNLESS THEY LOOK FOR COMPASSION OR SOME OTHER FORM OF WISDOM.

TAKEN FROM MY GRANDFATHER'S BLESSINGS BY RACHEL NAOMI RAMEN. PP.258 - 259

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SO, TOO, IT IS WITH TODAY'S GOSPEL STORY...

JESUS' APPROACH TO LAZARUS'S ILLNESS AND DEATH WAS NOT UNLIKE RACHEL'S MOTHER'S APPROACH TO HER DAUGHTER'S DIAGNOSIS ...

JESUS SAYS, "THIS ILLNESS IS NOT TO END IN DEATH, BUT IS FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, THAT THE SON OF GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED THROUGH IT"

THE CHALLENGE IS SIMILAR FOR US TOO, ISN'T IT - WHEN WE ARE

*FACING A TRANSITION, CHANGE, ILLNESS, ADVERSITY, IN OUR LIVES...
WE MUST PROCEED WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT IN SOME WAY, HIDDEN
TO US AT THE MOMENT, THE TRANSITION, THE SICKNESS, THE SETBACK,
IS NOT ULTIMATELY AGAINST US...*

*IT IS A TIME NOT ONLY OF PAIN, FEAR, UNCERTAINTY AND
FRUSTRATION BUT ALSO A TIME OF QUESTIONING AND SEEKING - AND
THEREFORE A PRIVILEGED TIME OF DISCOVERY - ONCE WE DISCOVER
OUR UNIQUE RECIPE FOR A "SPONGE CAKE".....*

*OF COURSE, THERE ARE TRANSITIONS - AND THEN THERE ARE
TRANSITIONS....*

*DEATH IS A TRANSITION CERTAINLY - BUT IN A CATEGORY ALL ITS
OWN.....*

*LET US LOOK MORE CLOSELY AT THIS GOSPEL PASSAGE AND HOW
MARTHA AND IN PARTICULAR MARY APPROACHED JESUS AND THEIR
BROTHER'S DEATH....*

*BOTH ADDRESS JESUS WITH THE EXACT SAME WORDS: "LORD, IF YOU
HAD BEEN HERE, MY BROTHER WOULD NOT HAVE DIED....."*

*IN OTHER WORDS, WHERE WERE YOU??? A HINT OF ANGER, NO DOUBT
MARY, HOWEVER, SEEMS TO BE MORE DIRECTLY, EMOTIONALLY AND
PHYSICALLY ENGAGED WITH JESUS ---*

*NOTICE THAT SHE ROSE QUICKLY AND WENT TO HIM, WHEN SHE SAW
JESUS - SHE FELL AT HIS FEET.... WEEPING*

*AS WE KNOW SHE WAS ALSO THE ONE WHO, ACCORDING TO JOHN, HAD
ANOINTED THE LORD WITH PERFUMED OIL AND DRIED HIS FEET WITH*

HER HAIR....

***THERE IS CLEARLY A CERTAIN INTIMACY - AND YES EVEN PHYSICAL
INTIMACY - BETWEEN MARY AND JESUS...***

***TO ME IT IS LIKE SHE SURRENDERS HERSELF TO JESUS - AT HIS FEET - IN
TEARS, IN EXCRUCIATING PAIN, SHE GIVES HERSELF AND HER PAIN
OVER TO HIM - SEEKING HIS COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF HER DEEP
LOSS.....***

***THIS SEEMS TO TOUCH JESUS DEEPLY....HER PRESENCE, HER TEARS, HER
REACHING OUT TO HIM, HER VULNERABILITY....***

HE BECOMES PERTURBED AND DEEPLY TROUBLED, BEGINS TO WEEP

***HIMSELF....AND ASK, "WHERE HAVE YOU LAID HIM?"
IT IS A TOUCHING MOMENT - HIGHLY CHARGED EMOTIONALLY....***

***THESE TWO WOMEN, MARTHA AND MARY, MAY - IN THE CONTEXT OF
OUR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL PROCESS - LEAD US TO THINK ABOUT TWO
OTHER WOMEN WHO WERE ALSO INVOLVED IN A HIGHLY CHARGED
TRANSITION IN THEIR LIVES...***

***ANOTHER MARY AND HER COUSIN, ELIZABETH - DEFINITELY A CRITICAL
TRANSTION - THIS ONE - NOT A DEATH - BUT A BIRTH - FULL OF JOY AND
GRATITUDE..BUT POINTING TO UNSEEN CHALLENGES....***

***MARY OF BETHANY AND MARY OF NAZARETH, IT SEEMS TO ME, ARE
SPECIAL MODELS FOR US AT TIMES OF TRANSITION, AT TIMES OF
CRISIS.....***

MARY OF NAZARETH REACHES OUT AT A CRITICAL TIME - THE FIRST

*TRIMESTER OF HER PREGNANCY - CERTAINLY A TIME OF TRANSITION
AND ANXIETY - TO VISIT AND CARE FOR HER OLDER COUSIN IN NEED
AND SHARE WITH HER - HER JOY AS EXPECTANT MOTHER.....*

*SHE FULLY EMBRACES THE CHANGE WITH ALL ITS CHALLENGES AND
SPURRED ON BY THE NEW ENERGY IN HER LIFE REACHES OUT TO
ANOTHER IN NEED....*

*MARY OF BETHANY FULLY ACKNOWLEDGES HER LOSS, EMBRACES AND
EXPRESSES HER PAINFUL EMOTIONS, AND IS WILLING TO SEEK OUT
NEEDED COMFORT...*

*THE PAIN AND THE TEARS BRING HER TO THE FEET OF JESUS - SEEKING
COMFORT AND TRANSFORMATION OF HER PAIN IN THAT INTIMATE
CONNECTION...*

*WHETHER IT IS BIRTH OR DEATH, OR IN BETWEEN, BEGINNINGS OR
ENDINGS....*

*WE CAN LOOK TO MARY OF NAZARETH AND MARY OF BETHANY WHO
HAVE GONE BEFORE US...*

*SO IT SEEMS ESPECIALLY APPROPRIATE THAT WE COME TOGETHER THIS
WEEK WHEN THE DEMOLITION OF ST. ANNE'S, OUR NOVITIATE, BEGINS...*

*CERTAINLY - AN ENDING - A LOSS THAT REPRESENTS MORE THAN 100
YEARS OF OUR HISTORY - BUT IT ALSO USHERS IN A BEGINNING*

*WE CAN BE PROUD OF THE FACT THAT WE ARE A BRIDGE GENERATION -
WHICH RAY FITZ ALLUDED TO SEVERAL YEARS AGO - SO FORTUNATELY
IT IS A LONG BRIDGE - AND WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO CARRY ON THE
MARIANIST HERITAGE DURING A CRITICAL PERIOD OF TRANSITION -*

POST VATICAN II AND INTO THE 21ST CENTURY - AND WE ARE AND WILL CONTINUE CARRY IT FORTH....

THIS MARIANIST HERITAGE WILL ENDURE AND WE ARE PLAYING A ROLE IN PASSING IT ON DURING THESE VERY CRITICAL TIMES....

SO WE COME TOGETHER AT THIS EUCHARIST - AND RECALL THAT JESUS ON THE NIGHT BEFORE HIS FINAL PASSAGE GATHERED WITH HIS CLOSEST FOLLOWERS , SHARED A MEAL WITH THEM AND ASKED THEM TO REMEMBER HIM...

HE PROMISED TO REMAIN WITH THEM AND WITH US

SO WE REMEMBER HIM IN THIS EUCHARIST AND HIS GIFT OF HIMSELF TO US....

WE CELEBRATE THAT GIFT.....

WITH MARY OF BETHANY WE COME TO HIM AT THIS TABLE AND IN OUR OWN WAY PERHAPS FALL AT HIS FEET - IN TEARS AND WE HEAR THE WORDS: "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; WHOEVER BELIEVES IN ME, EVEN IF HE DIES, WILL LIVE, AND EVERYONE WHO LIVES AND BELIEVES IN ME WILL NEVER DIE"