Reflections for Wednesday Evening Prayer in Holy Week 2020

Based on this evening’s readings:
Ps 88,  Isa. 63.1-9,  Rev. 14.18-15.4

In reflecting on our readings for this Holy Wednesday evening, the vibrant image of (red) grapes being crushed on the wine press came very vividly to mind. This is because, it seems to me, that this image represents both death and life.

Firstly, in the context of what is happening all over the world at this present time, and in the light of Good Friday coming, this image for me becomes an image of death. Why is this? This is because grapes need to be crushed for their juice and goodness to be released in the making of new wine. In the same way, we are aware of Jesus’ own experience of his body being crushed to death as he slowly suffocates on the cross, unable to get his breath and at the same time his life blood ebbing out of him in the utter surrender of his life to God, out of love for all humanity. His shedding of blood is to become for us the new wine of the Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus also demonstrates how we are to live and how we are to face death through all the many things and experiences we have to endure that can, and have crushed us in this life of chance and change, and over which we have little control as we are experiencing now. We can however choose to transform these crushing experiences, with the grace and strength of God, bringing new life out of death.

So tomorrow, Maundy Thursday, we will remember those last words and actions of Jesus at the last supper as Jesus offers and shares the bread and wine with his closest friends, to become symbols of his broken body and his blood shed; And at the same time, inviting them and us today to consume and do likewise for our transformation and for the transformation and spiritual nourishment of our broken world, His Sacred Body on earth.

In this way, the image of the grapes being crushed also become a powerful symbol of Life, for we have the privilege of knowing, unlike Jesus’ apostles at the time, that his sacrifice was not in vain; For as a result of the crushing of the grapes, a symbol as I suggest of the crushing of Jesus’ body to death and his life blood being shed and the cup of suffering drunk, Jesus will become the new wine of the heavenly banquet, which we celebrate every time the Eucharist is offered.

This revelatory image of transformed wine also reminds us of the beginning of Jesus ‘ministry in John’s gospel and of his first miracle when he changes the
water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, celebrated ‘on the third day’, notes John, which is of course the day of resurrection and is the symbol of the True Life of the Spirit and the Risen Life of Christ into which we are invited to participate in this life as well as in the next.

But first there is the crushing pain, the agony of body and mind and the necessary suffering, passion and death of Jesus before his rising in glory. There is also the crushing experience of abandonment, crushing rejection, isolation and loneliness, the crushing betrayal, the crushing of the apostles’ expectations, and their own betrayal and the crushing experience of seeming failure and defeat. And also for Jesus, the crushing temptation to give up, to let his Spirit be crushed with anguish and despair before the hope of the resurrection.

This experience of death, and new life arising out of death in all its forms and crushing experiences of pain and loss in all its forms is our path too and especially now, as so many people all over the world are in the grip of this deadly virus. Here too, we find the crushing fear, anguish, agony and grief that goes with sickness and death. And we grieve and feel crushed and are left with questions that we cannot answer and can do very little about.

And yet…..And yet, there are emerging so many countless and sacrificial acts of kindness, neighbourliness and compassion that have and are coming out of this crisis, and a new understanding that what matters most is how we care for each other, how we are interdependent on each other and how all of us are connected.

All we can do is wait on God in silent prayer, trust in God’s loving presence with us and hope in God’s promises.

Like Lyn, dreams have been very significant to me in my life, especially in times of trouble, loss and grief, or feeling vulnerable. In these times, I have slowly learnt that God’s presence can be experienced more vividly even in dreams, So, I would like to share with you one such dream that has stayed with me for well over 45 years following the premature death of my dear father at the age of 60. An insight that continues to stay with me. So….

_In my dream, I was walking on the road to Emmaus alongside Jesus on his right hand side. There was another person walking with him on his left hand side. Jesus was in a long white garment. I started to cry and leaned over to Jesus and said that I was sorry and asked if I could hold his hand. Jesus said ‘no’. I remember feeling a little shocked in the dream at his response, then after a short pause, Jesus said to me ‘Let me hold your hand’._
Reflection: I will always remember this dream and it has taught me so much; that it is always God who does the holding and reaching out even as we reach out to be held.

Mother Julian of Norwich was to experience in her own turbulent times that inspiring insight that ‘All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well’.

I would also like to finish with a short prayer poem which I wrote down in an attempt to express what was running through my heart and mind at this troubled time:

So many thoughts and feelings wheeling through my mind, as they do in each and everyone of us, humankind.

At this time of corona crisis, of fear, of premature death and sickness, let us learn to receive the Power that comes in weakness.

To know, after all, that we are not in control of that, which is our lot; but know again the heart of God in enduring the pain that shatters What our egos claim matters!

Let us integrate the darkness into our lives that can infect us all; but through which endarkenment can be transformed into enlightenment.

The night turned into day despair turned into hope tears turned into joy water transformed into wine death transformed into life and hate transformed by love.

For the ways of God are not what we expect;
the path of ascent is the way of descent
into the tears of the world in which we are hurled
with all of creation for its Divine Formation. Amen

Gabrielle Ayerst