



Funeral Preaching for Marion Patrick Connors, SNJM
January 25, 1934 – March 14, 2017
Mass of Resurrection -- April 30, 2017

Today's two readings, one from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, and the other from the New Testament Gospel of John, share the common attribute of being short. This, Marion Patrick would have liked – no frills, just short and to the point! And, by the way, I will follow Auntie's wishes and keep this preaching short!

So, now is a good time to ask, just what is the point, or, more precisely, what are the points of intersection and connection in these two short readings? Well, as far as Marion Patrick was concerned, the story of this first reading began decades ago. She and I were having a conversation and she commented on the Isaiah reading. As I recall, we might have been listening to Bob Dufford's song Let the Valleys Be Raised. What I remember very clearly is her articulation of the sense of peace, hope, and comfort this reading offered to her. Much to my surprise, she took a very personal view of the actions of a powerful God who could lift up the valleys, level the mountains and hills, and transform the otherwise rugged land into a great plain. She noted that this was what she looked forward to for herself some day in the distant future.

Recovering from the initial shock of her uncharacteristically personal sharing, I hesitatingly and gently asked her to explain a bit more about what she meant. She actually applied the images to herself! I was profoundly struck by her sharing of this notion that whatever in her needed lifting up, leveling off, or being made less rugged would happen someday. Clearly this was something deeply meaningful to her, that brought her great comfort, and allowed her the courage to keep going and growing into her fullness. In the days since Marion Patrick's last trip to the hospital, these images have been with me in such a way, that it seems as if our conversation happened very recently.

However, I am also conscious that this conversation has implications beyond the time that it originally occurred. Importantly for those of us gathered here today, I think this reading speaks to each of us also, as we contemplate our time of meeting our God with all our imperfections of valleys, peaks and rugged patches made straight. No matter how difficult the struggles of life, no matter what the cost, ultimately it is God's action at work in us that shows forth God's majesty and glory.

In contrast, in our Gospel reading we are positioned within the Last Supper discourse, just prior to the passage containing the Vine and Branches imagery. However, we do not have the clear and powerful images present in the Isaiah reading. Instead Jesus is engaged in an intimate conversation with his disciples, attempting to prepare them for the future, including the difficult times ahead.

Although there was no prior conversation with Marion Patrick concerning this passage, I believe she would approve of this choice for the Gospel reading. As today we find ourselves in the liminal/middle space between Easter and Pentecost, I think we, like the disciples, have great cause for hope, consolation and courage, if we really contemplate and bring into our hearts the message and implications of this section of John's Gospel.

This very short passage overflows with multiple promises made not only for the disciples and not merely as one-time statements. Instead, these promises of Jesus are something to be heard, remembered, treasured, and recalled over time by all throughout the ages who call themselves followers of Jesus.

We are promised unequivocally the gift of the Holy Spirit, the one who animates, teaches, and reminds us about all that Jesus has promised. As if the gift of the Holy Spirit were not enough, Jesus promises his followers a very special gift of peace- one that is uniquely far above and beyond any other type of worldly peace we could experience. Additionally, Jesus promises specifically that he will not abandon his followers (and by extension each of us). Instead, he promises that he will return after a time away.

It seems that Jesus has planned for just about everything, including difficult and trying times, as he concludes with the statement: "And now I have told you this before it happens, so that when it happens you may believe." Let us ponder the meaning of these words as we travel through the days between the Easter celebration and the great feast of Pentecost. Let us look forward to the day on which each of us will know the fullness of these promises.

Right now I am more than just a bit jealous of Marion Patrick, because she fully understands this message, with all its implications. This is our future, also, but not just yet.

Because of the actions of the God who called her to religious life as a Sister of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, we can say without reserve that indeed Marion Patrick was a faithful daughter of Mother Marie Rose who has joined the company of so many others who have gone before her. She now celebrates with her parents, Lillian and William and her siblings Marion and William.

Chris M. Wood, OP (niece of Sister Marion Patrick Connors, snjm)
April 30, 2017