

The Kinship of God

This evening we have gathered in the presence of the Holy Eucharist to pray for our world and for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are suffering from so many ailments, some natural and some the result of sin.

I read a reflection recently by the founder of Homeboy Industries that I would like to share with you tonight.

Homeboy Industries may be one of the most visibly transformative communities in the United States today. It was founded in 1998 by Jesuit priest Fr. Gregory Boyle, or Fr. "G" (as his community likes to call him). Moved by the heartache of the people he served while pastor of Dolores Mission Church in Los Angeles, Fr. Greg started Homeboy Industries to assist individuals and families affected by the cycle of poverty, drugs, gangs, and incarceration. Along with many Homeboys and Homegirls, he believes the healing process can only happen when we are in relationship with one another. The success of this organization offers evidence to support his belief.

Fr. G writes:

Mother Teresa diagnosed the world's ills in this way: we've just "forgotten that we belong to each other." Kinship is what happens to us when we refuse to let that happen. With kinship as the goal, other essential things fall into place; without it, no justice, no peace. I suspect that were kinship our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice – we would be celebrating it.

He goes on:

Often we strike the high moral distance that separates "us" from "them," and yet it is God's dream come true when we recognize that there exists no daylight between us. Serving others is good. It's a start. But it's just the hallway that leads to the Grand Ballroom.

Kinship – [is] not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not “a man for others”; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that.

Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away. The prophet Habakkuk writes, “The vision still has its time, presses onto fulfillment and it will not disappoint . . . and if it delays, wait for it [2:3].”

Kinship is what God presses us on to, always hopeful that its time has come.

I like the concept of “kinship” and I think that it is the remedy for the pain and suffering that plagues our world. It is also a concept firmly rooted in the Gospel and the vision of Jesus Christ that “all be one.”

“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.” John 17:21-23

Unless and until humanity acknowledges our fundamental interconnectedness with one another and with creation itself, we are doomed to continue inflicting pain and suffering upon one another.

Kinship comes from the word “kin” means family member or relative. Kinship can describe the relationship we have with our blood relatives but it can also mean the relationship we have with other human beings who share the same origin or have the same characteristics or qualities.

A fundamental fact about humanity is that we are all related to one another by our humanness. We are all kin because we have the same origin and share the same qualities and characteristics inherent in our humanness. Terrible pain and suffering has been caused throughout the ages simply because human beings have not acknowledged our common heritage as sons and daughters of God the Creator. We are brothers and sisters. We are kin. To quote Mother Teresa “we belong to each other.”

Jesus preached this same message and so often we have failed to heed his words “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” And who is our neighbor? Our neighbor is everyone. Jesus was rejected by his own for insisting that all human beings belong to God and that the Kingdom of God is belongs to all God’s children.

The word kinship is very close to the word kingdom. Jesus came to establish the kingdom of God which would also be the kindom of God - brothers and sister living together united by God’s Spirit. It is to be kingdom of brothers and sisters living in a world of justice, peace, and especially love.

St. Francis of Assisi was one of the first human beings to speak about the interconnectedness of all created matter – human beings, animals, trees, the sun, the moon, water, fire, etc.

In his Canticle of the Creatures, he names each of them as brother or sister. This was a divine insight, one which he believed could change the world. He founded a community of brothers and sisters who shared every thing and lived together as brothers and sisters demonstrating to the world the vision of God that we are all kin to one another.

The global coronavirus pandemic has simultaneously brought about a physical separation from one another and yet it has also brought us into a greater solidarity with one another. Throughout the world human beings are sharing a common experience which draws us closer together. We share a common humanity and now a common suffering. We are kin in this unexpected and unsought pandemic.

Through these last few months we have seen people working together more, sharing more, caring more, loving more. We have observed the heroic efforts of health care workers and first responder putting their lives on the line for perfect strangers. Nurses holding the hands of the dying because their blood relatives could not be present. This is kinship. We are related to one another. We share a divine origin and a divine DNA.

A similar reality can be seen in the peaceful protests against the sin of racism. Unfortunately, these peaceful marches have been overshadowed in the media by images of rioting and looting by those who want to divide us rather than unite us. These peaceful protests show people of all races, ages, nationalities, and religions, joining in solidarity with one another to denounce brutality against people of color. In solidarity they are protesting the evils of systemic racism and the pain and suffering that black people have experienced for centuries and continue to experience. This is kinship. As Fr. G stated in his reflection: "Kinship – [is] not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not "a man for others"; he was one with them."

We pray tonight that we will embrace the vision of Jesus, of St. Francis of Assisi, of Fr. G and to do all we can to see every human being as brother and sister and to see in that brother and sister the image of the Creator.

We are all kin. Jesus' prayer that we all be one was also a pray that one day all people live together in the kinship of God. We are called to make Jesus' vision for humanity a reality.

I conclude with words from the Book of Revelation; words which speak of this divine reality:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always

be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away." The one who sat on the throne* said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true."