

Do you not perceive it?

Lord may the meditations of my heart and the words of my lips be acceptable in your sight. AMEN

In his book, “With Open Hands”, Henri Nouwen wrote:

“Praying means, above all, to be accepting toward God who is always new, always different. For God is a deeply moved God whose heart is greater than ours. The open acceptance of prayer in the face of an ever-new God makes us free. In prayer, we are constantly on the way, on a pilgrimage. On our way, we meet more and more people who show us something about the God who we seek. “

These words resonate strongly as we are drawn into today’s scripture stories of the journeys of Saul, Ananias and Peter.

In our First Reading, we encounter Saul breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. Saul’s goal was single-minded – to annihilate this new Christian movement called the Way. Saul’s adherence to an old way seemed to have the objective of destroying any individuals who were in his path. I cannot help but compare Saul’s journey to that of Jonah. Saul was on a pilgrimage to Damascus with wrong intentions which could lead him away from God much like Jonah’s journey on a ship. And like Jonah, Saul was so caught up in his own zeal that he could not see his stubbornness and self-righteousness.

Earlier, at the stoning of Stephen, Paul seems to repress the new way for the old with uncompromising rigor. Yet, perhaps at that moment, down deep inside of his being, an unrealized spark was growing in Saul's soul which Christ would light.

And in fact, Christ's light came smack dab upon him and Saul's spiritual life would never be the same! One commentary connected this event to the encounter of Moses with the divine Presence in Exodus 3. Like Moses, Saul is startled with a manifestation of brightness, hears his name called twice, hears the voice identify itself, and receives a commission. We might be tempted to say that when Saul became blind, he had, in a deeper sense, an "eye-opening" experience.

No matter how this event played out, the prayer gates seemed to open within Saul. His connection to those of the Way began with Ananias as he began his new spiritual journey with the Lord. This would be a pilgrimage which would fill his heart and mind in the love of the Lord – a Lord who spiritually nurtured Saul into Paul to mission to both Jews and Gentiles.

Now what about Ananias? I cannot help but contrast him, as well, with Jonah's story in the Old Testament. Remember when God asks Jonah to go to Ninevah and speak so that their community would repent and turn to God? Jonah was reluctant and his resistance was nonsensical. Instead of being happy that God's grace had forgiven the repentant Ninevites, Jonah permitted his selfish arrogance to make him indignant. In Ananias we see just the opposite.

He had questions in his call from the Lord concerning Saul. Yet he is only asking for clarification – not refusing – not indignant. In this scene we sense an inkling of the mature spiritual relationship of Ananias with the Lord. He was willing to accept the danger and responsibility for assisting Saul. This part of Ananias’ spiritual journey must have been stressful but rewarding when he heard Saul proclaim in the synagogue that Jesus was the Son of God.

In our gospel reading from John, we encounter Peter and the disciples who are experiencing what we might call an “in-between” time. Not sure of what the present or the future holds, they head backward to their old vocation of fishing for treasures in the sea. Yet they could not catch anything. After the disciples have fished in the dark, the risen Jesus appears on the shore in the bright light of dawn. Jesus asks about their catch and suggests that they cast their net on the right side of the boat. They obey and have so many fish that at first the net cannot be hauled in.

Aren’t they being reminded by the Lord that their new vocation was to “catch” people not fish? In her book, “Written That You May Believe”, Sandra Schneiders suggests that it seems fairly clear that the enormous catch, which became possible only at Jesus’ command, represents the mission of the church which will be fruitful as long as their members abide in the Lord.

At the conclusion of this gospel story, Jesus refocus’ Peter, the disciples and even us from the past to the present and future in two words, “Follow me.”

So, what do the readings for today tell us about following the Lord?

I believe they challenge us to.....

Always be watchful and listen closely to what God has to say to us. To abide in prayer with the Lord.

To not just speculate about what God is doing but to perceive, through prayer and reflection, in what new direction the Lord is calling us to follow him.

One of my favorite bible verses is from Isaiah 43:19. It gives a beautiful proclamation from God on contemplating the new. The Lord says to the prophet: “*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*”

Lord, may we hear and respond to all things new in you and ponder on how they are opportunities for spiritual growth. AMEN