

Vision of Love

Since once again, Lord, ...I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.

Excerpt from *The Mass on the World* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.

I have been meditating a lot this week on the words of this mystical text by Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit priest, paleontologist (the study of rocks), and philosopher who lived a rather hidden life at a time when the world and his Church was not yet ready to embrace his vision of God's love for the world. Teilhard wrote *La Messe sur le Monde* (The Mass on the World) while he was on a lone field expedition in the Ordos Desert in inner Mongolia in 1923. His meditation feeds us particularly at a time when we too do not have the luxury of worshipping in our beloved church building in a gathered community due to the stay-home and self-isolate order in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. I invite you to join Teilhard to celebrate a spiritual Eucharist beyond the confines we face these coming weeks in our own home by offering to God "*all the labours and sufferings of the world*" until we are permitted to worship once again in our beloved sanctuary at St. Bart's.

On this Fourth Sunday in Lent we encounter another extended narrative from John's Gospel. This could have been just another healing miracle of Jesus—Jesus opening the eyes of a man born blind. But as it turns out, it is more than just another miraculous healing of Christ. In fact, nothing is *just another miracle* in John's Gospel. Each miracle to evangelist is a *sign* that reveals to us something unique and new about Jesus and his glory.

The story did not begin with a request for healing, but with a question from Jesus' disciples about who is to blame for the man's blindness, a question that helps us paint the religious landscape of the day.

"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

There is a vindictiveness embedded in the question, perhaps rooted from the deep seated innate human urge to assign blame to anything that doesn't fit our moral imagination.

We could trace this auto-response all the way back to our ancestor in the Garden of Eden in the Book of Genesis when Adam said, '*The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.*'

Oh, Adam, father of the earth...

A man born blind from birth. Who is responsible for this infliction? Someone got to be responsible and take the blame to satisfy our desire for blood.

An unknown contagion outbreak in central China. Who is responsible for starting this virus? Who is to blame for its spread? We won't be resting until we find a villain to crucify.

Jesus refused to resort to this vindictive rhetoric. He rejected the notion of a vindictive God.

"He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him."

Jesus doesn't allow us to solve our own or other people's problems through blame. The challenge he poses is **to discern the light of God in the midst of our darkness. In Jesus' vision everything, even the greatest tragedy, can become an occasion in which God's works can be revealed.**



You may have heard this before. The Chinese characters for **crisis** are 危機 (pronounce as *wéi jī*): **Danger and/with Opportunity.** In Jesus' vision, every single moment in God's time (Greek: *kairos*) is *wéi jī*: **a dangerous time to turn inward and mirror the desire of our ancestors to see find a scapegoat to sacrifice, and/or a ripen opportunity to turn to God who only mirror love and mercy.** Your choice.

Blindness to Jesus is when we turn inward and fail to recognize the person we are going to blame/pity/punish/cut off is a sister or brother in Christ bearing the same image and glory of God whom he called his Abba Father.

If that is the case, **sight** (our ability to see) to Jesus is to recognize the deep connectedness of every human being and every aspect of God's creation. In this vision, the earth, the ocean, the air, and every living that live on/in them are part of the one Body of Christ whose wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of each of its parts. I believe that must be the original meaning of Communion (Greek: *koinonia*). Teihard must have recognized that too as he made Eucharist in the desert when there was no altar, no bread, and no wine. He knew that the labours and sufferings of the world in which he offered would be transformed into a solidarity and a oneness that would comforts and heals all who partake in the Mass.

Jesus says, "*I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind.*" *The Message*, John 9.39

So what are you seeing in the current predicament our world is facing in light of COVID-19? Here are some of what I am seeing:

1. Nothing unites the human race more effectively than a pandemic: COVID-19 has leveled the playing fields significantly between the rich and the poor, the developed nations and the developing counterparts. This pandemic **does not discriminate** base on levels of wealth, ethnicities, cultures, creeds, and ideologies. We are all ONE in the suffering.
2. Status quo are being challenged and thrown off the bus as the global communities are forced to do their business outside the box. Things we were told that cannot be done/achieved prior to COVID-19 are getting quick results as levels of governments, businesses, and communities create new rules of engagements and collaborate in ways that have never tried before. What we may see emerging is a new world with a new set of priorities and new ways to organize resources to support them.

3. The economy, the holy grail (in lowercase) that has been dictating every major decision since the industrial revolution has been mortally wounded by COVID-19 and for once the health, safety, and well-being of citizens becomes the Number One priority. Could we see ourselves living in a new world when the well-being of the whole planet takes the driver seat in relative to other things?
4. We are being asked to make various degrees of sacrifices to *flatten the curve* of transmission of COVID-19. We were told by Public Health experts around the world that this pandemic will not go away without every single citizen in the world making some sacrifices be they their rights and freedom, jobs, wealth, health, and for some their lives to help stop the pandemic from spreading.

Making self-sacrifice may be a second language to some but it should be the mother tongue for those who called themselves disciples of Jesus. For once upon a time, God loves the world so much that she sacrificed herself on the Cross so that all may have life, not just life but life abundantly. Sounds familiar?

What are you prepared to sacrifice so that others may not be exposed to COVID-19?

I saw this on someone's post on Facebook that strikes me as a form of repentance (turn around) which is simple and practical. It goes like this:

Don't live your life out of fear of getting infected.

But live as if you were already infected and needed to protect your love ones from getting it from you.

Stay home (unless your work is to provide essential services). Take an extended sabbath. Practice social distancing not for you own sake but others.

If everyone of the Sunshine Coast would make this sacrifice, we could stop community transmission right here. Remember 危機 (*wéi jī*): the danger is real but the opportunity to turn things around is always **in your hand**.

I offer these words of Teilhard de Chardin for your continual meditation this coming week from *The Mass on the World*:

This bread, our toil, is of itself, I know, but an immense fragmentation; this wine, our pain, is no more, I know, than a draught that dissolves. Yet in the very depths of this formless mass you have implanted—and this I am sure of, for I sense it—a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike, “Lord, make us one.”

Lord, make us ONE. Amen.

