

This week I remembered an incident a friend of mine from BC told me about awhile back. This guy is one who regularly tells me, "You know, I'm not into religion anymore, I'm into spirituality." He told me about a time when he ran into his old parish priest at TJ's (Trader Joe's) in the wine section. He said the beloved old priest asked him after a "how's it going" question, did he ever still go to St. Bernard's? My friend told me he said, "Ah Father, no, I don't go--they're a bunch of hypocrites." To which the priest responded with a smile, "You should go, one more might make a difference." My friend never forgot that quip. Hypocrisy really grates at us. No matter if its pointed out by our house mate, teenage son or daughter, beloved spouse or professional drinking buddy. On CNN's Piers Morgan Tonight's hour-long interview with Michael Moore in a town-hall setting, Piers turned up the interview with the direct question to the celeb, "Tell me about your wealth, in relation to the 'one percent' and the '99 percent,' on Occupy Wall Street? Michael Moore's face was so revealing and distraught. He stammered a little and then threaded the needle in his usual candid, cutting, satirical manner. But the noted activist and famous film maker was stunned. Hypocrisy gets us, even the more sifted, seasoned standouts get caught in what Jesus railed about most often--those things we do or don't do that differ from what we say through our behavioral teaching. And it should, given the impact of basic life relational needs. At the end of this Sunday's gospel's very chapter, in Matthew 23, the evangel records Jesus saying seven times, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites"! Woe yes, but don't stay on the bench, because Matthew in this gospel deeply desires us to see something much more. The main thing he wants us to see and know is that although Jesus was born in the sticks and never had two cents to rub together, and was ignored by just about everybody who mattered, *and* was strung up in the end between two crooks, he was the same Messiah, the same Christ, the same anointed One, that for centuries God's people had been waiting for with tears in their eyes (*F. Buechner, Peculiar Treasures p.119*). He *was* Jesus the Christ. (And Christ was not his last name.) Everything Matthew wrote was aimed at convincing us that this was so and that to accept it was to find eternal Life, and that to deny it was to be like the Pharisees to whom Jesus said, "Woe to you...sons (*and daughters*) of those who murder the prophets... You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to Hell?" We are the Pharisees. But, the Pharisees who follow Jesus.

To mature here, let's re-examine who these Pharisees were in the first century. In New Testament times there are many groups to learn and know. First, there are the Sadducees--the patrician party made up of members from the high priestly families, the aristocracy, and other wealthy individuals. They were perhaps quite like the 'functionalists' in classic sociology. They advocated loyalty to the State, the Temple, and the Jewish Law. Sadducees wanted you to just do your job and keep your mouth quiet, just stay in your station in Life. Then, you have the Zealots who want to revolt against what was wrong in the empire, and no surprise, for there was much wrong politically. The Zealots were close to the blood in the streets. Then there was the Pharisees--their name comes from the Hebrew for 'interpreters', but Pharisee can also mean 'separatist,' which their opponents called them. Some Pharisees became extreme in their insistence to keep the Law in every detail by applying it to all matters of daily life and work. They loved the Torah which was the accumulated theological

decisions that made Jewish faith and practice possible, and more precious after the trauma of the fall of Jerusalem. The Pharisees' spirituality made it possible for the gift of the Jews to be passed and tended--not just in Jerusalem but in all places outside the great holy City. Faith for the Pharisees was centered in the home and synagogue. They interpreted scripture much more generously than did the Sadducees, they extended belief in such matters as angels and demons, life after death, a fierce final reckoning, and the ever-compelling rising of the dead. The Pharisees kept ritual purity and tithing, they were lay scholars rather than priests, were spiritually disciplined with the laws of the Temple, and they exhibited impressive democratic tendencies. Disputation was a key part of their ways. Some of the Pharisees genuinely argued to try to learn God's mind. Jesus regularly engaged this group. Of all groups--and there are others like the rabbis and "the people of the land," the common populace, the 'hoi polloi'--Jesus and his followers were closest to the Pharisees, even though he was radically relentless on them. Chiefly, Jesus wanted people to experience the kingdom of heaven and the Pharisees were slow in getting this core paramount reality in the present hour. I believe it is foremost to the Pharisees--even though it is also to these other groups that Jesus laments at the close of Matthew:23--"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not let me." We are the Pharisees, and if we can eat this truth, we will see more of the face of God.

I want us to turn our Pharisaical gaze now to Occupy Wall Street in Boston. It was very cold last night and snow arrived before the usual November wake-up--it's winter already. Some of our fellow Bostonians slept outside in the downtown financial center in tents. Can you imagine? What if "Occupy Boston" is one of God's main manifestations in our time as one Episcopal Ph.D. student wrote and preached in her blog. How do we Pharisees figure what our response will be to this motley in-breaking of the kingdom of God now? Right here? Will we read what Nicholas Kristof in the NY Times wrote and recommended concerning what "Occupy Wall Street" should identify as their growing primary agenda? Should we just listen to Amy Goodman from Democracy Now talk about this nascent movement on Charlie Rose? Do we just go downtown on a Sunday afternoon when we are off from our regular gigs, to see for ourselves who these people really are? Should we show up with a soul friend on Wednesday at 5:30pm by the statue of Mohandas Gandhi to join in the ecumenical service of Holy Communion? Do we drop off a good money contribution after work at their public-response tent, knowing they need stuff to carry on? Would we urge some people we know in our more trusted circles to consider making hot food or gather basic provisions we use everyday and bring them down for some people standing forth for God's best and better Way now? How about just showing up and saying, "What do you really need done today?" Some Pharisees do these things. Other Pharisees will just wait and see God in the rear-view mirror claiming, "I saw it all along. I told you so." But if something is wrong, we must say it's wrong, otherwise we most often never will and our righteousness will not be like Jesus, who the Pharisees secretly admired. The kingdom of God we yearn for is in our best actions, as we act grounded in the humility of servanthood, as today's gospel teaches. Pharisees like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, and

others, prayerfully listened to learn and learned to listen for what God's union instinctively told them to do.

In your bulletin today there is a contemplative poem entitled "Every Day is for Union" by Gregory Fruehwirth, an Anglican poet and monk from Wisconsin, who's been watching what's going on. I invite you to read it prayerfully now and consider what your response will be to Occupy Boston today. It's where our pharisaical spirituality meets the real religion of Jesus. Amen.

*(See poem next page)*

~ Every Day is for Union ~

*By Gregory Fruehwirth*

Every day we wake up from sleep,  
go about our lives  
sometimes with success, sometimes failure,  
sometimes anguished, sometimes relaxed,  
and then we go back to sleep again.

And every day the still, small voice,  
that calls us to love and honesty and presence  
is speaking there in the innermost chamber of our souls,  
waiting for us to awaken to its presence.

This voice can lead us through our day quietly,  
without fuss,  
without protestation,  
without show--  
lead us to live our day as an act of fidelity to the love  
that is not only in us  
but drawing all of humanity into itself.

If we are to hear this voice  
we will have to listen for it  
and this means learning  
to listen past  
our chattering consciousness,  
the legion of anxious, distressed, compulsive voices.

In our silent prayer we take up the practice  
of quietly laying aside  
our self-obsessive inner monologue,  
that terrible need to narrate  
And re-narrate our lives.

We do this so that we can hear the voice of One  
who speaks beyond all time  
and through all time  
and whose speaking calls our live into being.

This One who us beyond and with  
Speaks the simplest truth: I am.

I am bliss  
and I rejoice in you.  
And you are because I want you to be.  
Come and enjoy my love.

All the disciplines of the spiritual life,  
the methods,  
the practices,  
the religious beliefs.  
if they are not animated from our quiet listening  
to the voice that is other than our own,  
will become more godless  
until there is nothing left in them but our false selves  
living from one alarm to the next.

but if we listen to that voice, that voice that is not our  
own,  
that is so quiet and small,  
and if we devote each day to following that  
contemplative gift,  
Everything can be drawn into God.

Our baptismal vows, our marriage vows, our monastic  
vows  
all can be ways  
of opening ourselves to the mystery that is  
completely Other  
and yet is completely one.

Over and over again Blessed Julian of Norwich gives us  
this one message:  
That God rejoices in us.

That divine rejoicing is right there, right here,  
and the whole contemplative journey into humility is  
learning  
how to claim this  
and to enter in  
as our only home, knowing that  
without this, wherever we might be,  
we are in exile.

There is really not much to our lives,  
Nothing all that very exciting:  
Every day we wake up from sleep,  
go about our lives  
sometimes with success, sometimes failure,  
sometimes anguished, sometimes relaxed,  
and then we go back to sleep again.

and yet this most unspectacular day  
can be the means of our surrender to God,  
our union with God's rejoicing.