

11 Sunday B

June 13, 2021

St. Patrick

God's Word, again and again, marvels how new life can blossom in the midst of barrenness. Listen to the Prophet Ezekiel this Sunday:

**“I bring low the high tree,
I make high the low tree,
I dry up the green tree
and make the dry tree flourish.
I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it.”**

In the sixth century before Christ, through Ezekiel, God promises to bring a new King of Israel from their lowly humiliation at that time, their exile in Babylon. Yes, new hope in the midst of barrenness.

Five years ago Pope Francis gave an address before a joint session of Congress. He was the first pope ever invited for such an occasion. He talked about what he called “four representatives of the American people” who lived a witness of “hope and healing, of peace and justice”: Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day...and, finally, Thomas Merton. Ah, Thomas Merton might be seen as a weird representative of the American people. He spent his adult life as a Trappist monk at the Gethsemani monastery in Kentucky. Pope Francis chose him for his “capacity for dialogue and openness to God.”

Ambiguity splintered Merton's life. At times he enjoyed a deep closeness with his God; yet, this overlapped with sin and brokenness.

A prolific writer, Merton's books--beginning with his autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*--are read by millions, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. They learn from his spiritual insights. He addressed head-on the violence in our souls, especially when nuclear war could destroy us all. In this effort, Thomas Merton was in close dialogue with Dr. King.

A convert to Catholicism, before entering the monastery Merton perhaps fathered a child. He was in frequent crisis, and at odds, with his Abbot—kind of like the boss who lives with you in the same house.

In the last days of 1959—four years after his initial blow-up with his Abbot—Merton went out cutting down Christmas trees in the Kentucky woods of

Gethsemani. Upon returning to the monastery, he wrote this striking passage in his personal journal:

"The loblolly pines planted during my 1955 crisis are growing well. The whole property is dotted with trees I have planted in hours of anguish. The ones I planted in hours of consolation have not succeeded."

Friends: Merton wasn't talking about gardening. He was talking about God's plan. Even out of dryness and seeming nothingness, seeds grow amazingly into a rich harvest. It's the image which God's Word gives us today about how God works in our lives. Oh, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of God's promise to bring a new King of Israel out of their lowly humiliation during their time in exile.

And Merton wondered aloud at God's surprising ways. In the midst of *his* desolation and emptiness, there it happened—new life blossoms at God's behest.

St. Patrick's: For well more than a year, we've all been immersed in desolation and death and danger. As a people, we've faced darkness. Now, we might look back and begin to see that new life might be budding from seeds planted in the midst of our anguish.

The chosen people were surprised. Merton was stunned. Can we see the mustard seed planted in our anguish beginning to bud...and blossom by God's grace?

General Intercessions

June 13, 2021

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Nurture within us the seeds of virtue, courage, and love, especially during times of desolation; we pray to you, O Lord—

Sensitize us to the needs of young people, and help us to love them through their struggles; we pray to you, O Lord—

On the 5th anniversary of the massacre of 49 gay persons in Orlando, empower LGBTQ communities to claim their dignity and live without fear and discrimination; we pray to you, O Lord—

Forgive any spirit of contempt, arrogance, or disdain that we have carried or nurtured; we pray to you, O Lord—

Grant eternal life and glory to all who have died, especially Elsie Odasz, and all who have perished from Covid-19; we pray to you, O Lord—

