

Themes for Day One: Journeying Together toward Greater Authenticity

Derived from *The Tenderness of God: Reclaiming Our Humanity*, Chapter 1 “Becoming a Pilgrim People: Journeying Together”

“Honestly distinguishing between what we most deeply want and what we so readily settle for is a great help in discarding what keeps us from being free to create the life that we long for. Sometimes the very circumstances of our lives force us to ask ourselves with compelling urgency what truly matters to us and what does not. The very chaos of our current reality awakens us to our need for meaning and coherence, which turns out to be nearly as critical as our daily bread.” (p. 2)

“Genuine accompaniment always adds meaning to our lives. When our questions, our doubts, and our struggles are acknowledged and honored, we realize that we are courageously moving toward greater authenticity. When our gifts, our insights, and our growth are affirmed, we see ourselves making process toward the persons we strive to be. Claiming our identity as ‘pilgrims’ who seek to live more meaningfully and more purposefully, contributing to the common good of the human race is a helpful way of bringing greater coherence to our lives as human beings.” (p. 8)

“To go on pilgrimage is to engage more deliberately in a process of searching and growing. A pilgrimage is both an individual experience and a communal one. This is why the pilgrim is helpful metaphor to describe the individual searcher as well as the universal church, even the entire human species. We are constantly learning who we are in light of the relationships that form our being. For the believer, relationship with the divine is the overarching relationship that provides meaning. And yet, even the believer must constantly return to ask the question of who, exactly, we are in relationship with and how that relationship is developing at any given moment. Or, to put it another way, the ancient human question, ‘Who am I?’ leads inevitably to the equally important question ‘Whose am I?’ To whom do I belong, and how does that belonging form and shape me?” (p. 9)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

What price do we pay as human beings if we ignore our desire for greater meaning?

What are some of the markers of human authenticity? What are some of the barriers that keep us from creating “communities of mutual belonging”? What do we stand to gain from such communities?

Derived from *The Tenderness of God: Reclaiming Our Humanity*, Chapter 2: “Searching for Meaning: Disruption and the Need for Connection”

“God’s own dwelling in our midst fosters ‘solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice.’ And yet we live in a world oriented toward competition, superficiality, indifference, and even violence—forces that can splinter us within and disconnect us from one another. Is it any wonder that we feel in our hearts, our psyches, and our very bones the many contradictions of our reality as human persons?” (p. 13)

“Francis and Clare remind us that we are not meant to adjust to dehumanization. We have an intuitive capacity to recognize things that, at the human level, are simply wrong and compromise our humanity. This sensitivity to pathologies within our own cultures and communities is a positive human instinct that must be cultivated for our own well-being.” (p. 16)

“If what sets humans on the pilgrim journey is a desire for meaning, then the courage to confront deception and to find our deepest truths is critical. Milan Kundera writes that the human struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. In the face of painful memories or troubling awarenesses, the temptation to forget, deny, or ‘move on’ is even stronger. But if we are courageous enough to seek the truth of our lives and to press on for meaning in the face of meaninglessness, our own disillusionment can help us break through the layers of deception that surround us. War and captivity gave Francis a new critical lens through which to see the world in which he lived. Increasingly, he saw the economic, political and cultural forces of his day—as well as the religious structures that supported and upheld them—as dispiriting and even lethal. Slowly, Francis turned what we might see as ‘disillusionment’ into a clarion call toward a new way. The gift of these ‘lost years’ of his life was his clarity about the brokenness of the world around him. His dissatisfaction with its message and assumptions proved to be a useful starting point for creative possibility. Francis teaches us the value of recognizing when something isn’t working any more. Then humbly and collectively we can imagine something new.” (pp. 29-30)

QUESTIONS:

Describe some of the contradictions and tensions that you experience in your daily life and/or in the society in which you live. Are there social pathologies, and, if so, how would you characterize some of them?

What are some of the ways that you grow in understanding and wisdom?

What has served, for you, as “a clarion call toward a new way”? Has honesty about how something is not working provided you the means by which to grow toward something new?

What do you find attractive about being part of “a community of mutual belonging”? What do you find challenging about it? What have your experiences in your own community taught you about belonging, and what desires for connection do they stir in you?