

Themes for Day Two: Metanoia: A Transforming Change of Heart

Derived from *The Tenderness of God: Reclaiming Our Humanity*, Chapter 3: “Touched by Tenderness: Encountering God”

“The first step in the journey to appreciating the complexity of encounter is coming to grips with how many of us belong at the expense of even more who do not. It is a recognition that the ‘success’ of some comes on the backs of many, and that this way of life is emphatically not the kind of human flourishing that God has in mind for us... The way of Francis and Clare is a profound awakening to the God who walks with us, drawing us to the margins so that, slowly and steadfastly, the margins themselves are erased, and a new space, a new way is created.” (p. 33)

A simple prayer, coming from his humble spirit epitomizes this searing time in his life:

Most High,
All-glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me true faith,
Certain hope,
And perfect love,
Sense and understanding,
that I may know and do
Your most holy will.

“In his own account of this period in his life, described in the Testament he wrote shortly before his death, Francis tells us that being drawn into the leper colony and the flood of feelings that overcame him once there was, for him, a singular expression of God’s compassionate and tender love.... This was an experience of being pulled, immediately, out of his malaise and despair, of knowing a depth of connection that overcame him, of feeling a quickening of life flowing through him that now sought to extend itself into solidarity with people who had always horrified him. All of this showed Francis, instantly and directly, both who God was and who God called him to be.” (p. 42)

“As Francis began to accept vulnerability as an integral element of his own humanity, he found he had much to learn from those who lived with the pain of feeling rejected, ignored, and alone. For several years, he had known that something profound was missing from his life: now the joy and fellowship he found with those left for dead gave him a new clue as to how to find meaning in his own life. Francis’s initial experience at the leper colony taught him what he already instinctively knew: ‘The joy of life comes from the ways in which we live together and the pain of life comes from the many ways we fail to do that well.’” (p. 44)

“It is neither too stark nor too simplistic to understand that Francis’s encounters at the margins were revealing inconsistencies in his life and culture, and they now made certain demands of him. They required him to say no to forces in his society and culture that diminished human dignity and asked him to choose instead toward a new and ‘wonderfully complicated’ way of being connected to others.” (p. 51)

“Solving our problems requires us to grow beyond the smallnesses of character and vision that plague us, uncovering together a solidarity that dignifies and creates possibilities that, individually, we are unable to create. If love is, in the end, ‘the only light which can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working,’ we shall need to allow and enable love to give us the new human intelligence that our species currently requires. For love is not just a transforming power. It is the only viable strategy we have left.” (pp. 70-71)

QUESTIONS:

Describe an experience of encounter that changed you. What did it teach you about yourself? What did it teach you about others? Did it teach you something about God?

Why do you think Pope Francis is calling for us to create a “culture of encounter” to counteract the “globalization of indifference”? What is at stake?