

Seventh Sunday of Easter 8 May 2016

[Acts 16: 16-34 ;Psalm 97; Rev 22: 12-21; John 17:20-26](#)

[Easter 7C May 8, 2016](#) Textweek

We are in the seventh Sunday after Easter and the readings seem to have a much more complex feel when compared to some of the earlier post-Easter readings. Perhaps, their apparent complexity is magnified by our own movement back into the ordinary after our creative encounter with Easter's newness.

The contrast between our ordinary living and the glimpse of new life we may have encountered at Easter is an ever present ebb and flow in us, in the Church and in the world: and the first reading, in some strange way, seems to be a reflection of this daily dynamic; it is a story of the 'everyday' encounters of life.

"One day, as we were going to the place of prayer"; a contemplative, God-attuned beginning, the start of a normal day; 6.20am 'I was going to the chapel for morning prayer'.

"We met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination"; this 'slave girl' is representative of the enslaved and the powerless; and the *"spirit of divination"* provides a complete contrast as it indicates a power beyond the ordinary.

So the story begins by illustrating the reality of our prayer life and our 'church going'; we start with an intention, and an attention, and then so often we encounter a contrast from within, or without; a contrast with the conflicting forces of that which enslaves, that which renders us powerless; it is a conflict with the very forces that also provide a power beyond ourselves.

This encounter remains, and so too the conflict remains; *"she followed Paul and ... She kept doing this for many days."*

The slave girl raises a repetitive truth, and she gives voice to a very different enslavement; *"These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation."*

This whole episode deserves further exploration as we contemplate for ourselves that which enslaves us; and then go further and question if the very same also holds a voice of truth; another insight that seeks to identify for us another reality, a new version of 'enslavement' that takes us into the *"way of salvation."*

I don't have the answer, but it does invite further contemplation for it certainly made Paul *"very much annoyed"*.

And then we hear that Paul 'turned', he changed direction, repented, re-aligned and reoriented himself and said: *"I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."*

Clearly this is not an act of healing; for she had a 'spirit' of truth and as we know from the rest of the story, everyone was happy with the way things were. Rather, this is an act of integration; the *"spirit of divination"*, the voiced truth is no longer a voice outside of Paul.

In that act of turning, the everyday that had begun the story, the contemplative journey to Morning Prayer, that 'everyday' is overturned into a completely new story.

And now, the inner encounter of enslavement is realised in the actuality of a quite different experience and we are taken into the enslavement of the world around us, we now contemplate that which imprisons.

Here we find illustrated the place of money and the part played by the authorities and the law.

The slave owners, those using the 'spirit' of truth for their own gain, those who were driven by financial concerns, *"they seized Paul"*; and supported by the very system itself they had him imprisoned.

Once again we might contemplate the financial concerns that imprison us; the financial considerations that seek to have the 'spirit of truth' silenced.

We can then follow the account of all that occurs within the prison walls; for this is an account of life restricted by financial considerations, and for most of us this is another version of our 'everyday'; following the beating and then confined to the darkness of fear we live imprisoned and accept our lot with our fellow inmates.

Once again however, we see the world turned upside down; in the very depth of darkness there is another turning point; *"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."*

This first reading is an illustration of movement for us all, an inner movement and also a movement in relation to the world around us, it is a narrative of our every day, and one that is filled with both hope and encouragement.

And to give it a fuller context we see from the other two readings that the movement, or turning, that it illuminates is a turning toward oneness, wholeness and a turning to each other.

The gospel identifies a purpose for our 'turning' *"that they may all be one"*; it underlines for us the obvious; that together we can do so much better, than separately. If we have a will to achieve something, then when we join together, there is no telling what can be achieved.

However, we have to move out of both our inner and outer enslavement in order to embrace the attitude of sharing.

"That all may be one" is the revelation of Jesus and the reading from John speaks of a new understanding of relationship, and a new dynamic between humanity and divinity.

"That all may be one" does not turn us toward uniformity, but toward unity; and unity is being one together, and one with creation. Being 'one' does not ask for equality but it does turn us toward equity and so to a look at our activity in life, our treatment of others, and a general condition characterized by justice, fairness, and impartiality.

"That all may be one" turns the spotlight on every contrast, and illuminates every difference; as shown in the first reading we can explore further the sharp contrasts: between the prisoner and the jailer; between those driven by financial gain and those driven by the 'spirit of truth'; and the contrast between the slave and the free.

The gospel prayer of Jesus mirrors the contrast of the first reading; *"Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

And the final word from the book of revelation; *"See, I am coming soon; my reward is with me, to repay according to everyone's work."*; we saw that reflected in the command of Paul and in the earthquake of the first reading, the coming soon puts the divine reality right in to the 'everyday'.

And this new way of living, the new life lived in oneness, is an invitation to all, it is all encompassing:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end

"Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come."

And let everyone who is thirsty come.

Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

Peter Humphris