

Devotional Reflection, Tuesday, July 23, 2024
Proper 11, the week of the sixth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Sharing Jesus' Solitude

Key phrases for reflection from today's reading:

55At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

You will find the full text of today's Gospel at the end of this reflection.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (BCP, 977)

AM Psalm 45; PM Psalm 47, 48

Joshua 8:1-22; Rom. 14:1-12; Matt. 26:47-56

Today we celebrate the Feast of John Cassian. (See below.)

David's Reflections

this soul hath been
Alone on a wide wide sea:
So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be.*

Coleridge's sense of isolation and abandonment, expressed in this poem, came to mind as I reread the last verse of today's Gospel. "The disciples deserted him and fled." In yesterday's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples, "The shepherd will be stricken and the sheep will be scattered," speaking of his arrest and death and his expectation that the disciples would abandon him. Now, his expectations having been realized; Jesus stood alone with all his enemies growling at him and hungering to devour him.

The psalmist said, “For God alone my soul in silence waits. God alone is my salvation.” (Psalm 64:1). Jesus’ most trusted friends, including Peter, did not stand with him in his hour of greatest need. He faced torture, ridicule, and death alone, save for God’s sustaining presence. And on the cross he lived through a moment in which he sensed divine absence (“my God, my God, why have you forsaken me”). But, he persisted into a richer space, one in which he could say to God at the moment he died, “into your hands I commit my spirit.”

Every human relationship will fail us at some point. My grandparents and parents died, my parents prematurely in their 60’s. My marriage ended. My beloved younger brother, John, died December 10, 2020, at age 74. And, in January 2022, thirty years after our divorce, my ex-wife, Nancy, died, at age 76. Some of my formerly close friends now live in other parts of the world and those relationships have gone inactive, thanks to the separation. My children are grown, and though we still are close, one or both of them could die before I. In the normal cycle of generations, I shall predecease them (at least that is my prayer). Leaving your children feels counterintuitive, and death is the ultimate leaving. I dread that prospect, not being able to be present to them.

Even if married or in a long-term committed relationships we still are singular human beings, solitary selves; no human relationship can address all our relational and spiritual needs. The hunger for God always will remain. God knows how to be present and lessen that hunger without taking it away.

Poet Gregory Orr, in his classic work on lyric poetry says:

"Aloneness is an existential condition. We are born alone, we die alone. I live alone inside the world of my body in the sense that no one feels or can feel exactly what I feel, because he or she exists in the separate and distinct world of his or her own body. "When we can feel this existential aloneness as a kind of stability, even a pleasure, we call it solitude."+

When we feel like Coleridge, alone on that vast sea, we can remember that Jesus has been there, profoundly alone. He will keep company with us, whether we are aware of his presence or not. He understands that feeling of being cut off and solitary. He will stand with us. And, in moments when we feel most sharply our aloneness, we can cross over into Jesus’ experience and keep company with him in his aloneness as reflected in today’s reading. Though others may scatter, we will

continue to find Jesus in the Spirit's presence in our hearts, in Holy Scripture, and in bread and wine.

My reflections on Holy Trinity have led me to a new sense of living within the Triune life of God. Not only does Jesus keep company with us in our solitude, but that experience becomes the experience of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. We are enfolded within that life.

*Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in *The Portable Coleridge: Selections from the poems, Biographia Literaria, Literary Criticism, Political Essays, Notebooks and Letters*. Edited, and with an Introduction by I. A. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1977), pp. 90, 104.

+Gregory Orr, *Poetry as Survival* (Athens: Georgia UP, 2002), p. 34.

Collect of the Day, Proper 11, the ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 231)

Today we celebrate the Feast of John Cassian, abbot at Marseilles (died 435 CE).

http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/john_cassian.htm

Collect of the Feast of John Cassie

Holy God, whose beloved Son Jesus Christ blessed the pure in heart: Grant that we, together with your servant John Cassian and in union with his prayers, may ever seek the purity with which to behold you as you are; one God in Trinity of persons now and for ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Peace

Most holy God, the source of all good desires, all right judgments, and all just works: Give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, so that our minds may be fixed on the doing of your will, and that we, being delivered from the fear of all enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the mercies of Christ Jesus our Savior. *Amen.* (BCP, 123)

Of the Departed

Eternal Lord God, you hold all souls in life: Give to your whole Church in paradise and on earth your light and your peace; and grant that we, following the good examples of those who have served you here and are now at rest, may at the last enter with them into your unending joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*
(BCP, 253)

Prayer of Ignatius Loyola

Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest;
to give, and not to count the cost,
to fight, and not to heed the wounds,
to toil, and not to seek for rest,
to labor, and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do thy will. *Amen.*

http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Ignatius_Loyola.htm

A Collect for Early Evening

Grant us, Lord, the lamp of charity which never fails, that it may burn in us and shed its light on those around us, and that by its brightness we may have a vision of that holy City, where dwells the true and never-failing Light, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
(BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP, 100)

Daily Office Gospel, Matthew 26:47-56

47 While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.
48 Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.'
49 At once he came up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed

him. 50 Jesus said to him, 'Friend, do what you are here to do.' Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. 51 Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?' 55 At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. 56 But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.' Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*

Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*

Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*

Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*

Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*