

Psalmody and Nonviolence

– *brother Michael*

AN INTEGRAL PART OF MONASTIC LIFE IS PRAYING WITH the Psalms. When they are in dialog with our life they open new possibilities of insight and hope. An opportunity to practice this discipline was in our encounter with Iyad Burnat, a Palestinian who leads his West Bank village of Bil'in in nonviolent demonstrations against the Israeli Security Wall and all it represents.



Iyad Burnat

Psalm 118 has a beautiful refrain running freely throughout it, “Your love, O God, is everlasting.” (verses 1,2,3,4, and 29) Our dialog begins with the question, “What is our experience of loving each other?” Iyad’s witness gives us the example of loving with courage despite a 30 foot high concrete wall that has destroyed the olive trees which have sustained his family for generations.

This psalm in verse 22 also contains the image, “the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.” (Jesus, Gandhi, King) As Iyad spoke we could hear the suffering in his voice, yet he spoke remarkably without anger. The cornerstone of nonviolent action is foundational in our moving forward as one human family.

The psalms need to be read by listening with the ear of our heart. (Rule of Benedict) This requires practice and patience. To pray is a commitment to nonviolence. As Psalm 118 says, “We were pushed hard...but...God is our strength and song.” (verses 13, 14) This describes the heart of prayer and our hope for our future. ■