

“Today”: The Gift of Time

Fifty Years of Monastic Living

ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL THEMES of the Christmas season is captured in the word “today,” *hodie*. “Today Christ is born.” “Today salvation has come.” “Today, in the town of Bethlehem, a Savior has been born.”

Indeed, every morning — season after season — we sing the words of Psalm 95, “If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.”

As we conclude this year celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Weston Priory, we are profoundly aware of the gift of *time* — fifty years of “*today's*” — giving us the opportunity to remember in gratefulness, to respond in the present moment, and to look forward in expectation. *The gift of time.*

What is time? What is its meaning for us? When we find ourselves living on the surface of life, time can be no more than a succession of random moments. In a culture which cultivates precisely a *lack of depth and meaning*, time can become a kind of sentence to which we have been condemned.

But when we respond to life in faith, with reverence and receptivity, we discover another perspective: *time as gift, time as opportunity*. Time is the unfolding story of our life with God and with one another, and the story of God's life with us, calling forth our freedom.

God's love always comes to us as a totally free offer, and it is *time* that enables us to respond to that gift in full freedom. Time is the unfolding space between God's offer of love and our free, personal response. Time is pregnant with meaning, because it can be filled with our growing Yes to God's gift — a Yes lived out in our love for one another and for this world.

The “first love” (Rev. 2: 4) which animated the life of our founder, Brother Leo, had as its consequence the biblical command of *tikkun 'olam*, “the repair of the world” and the restoration of peace and reconciliation. This same Spirit-guided concern for the world's healing has called our community to a prayerful listening to the aspirations of the poorest of the world for *una vida mas digna*, a life with dignity worthy of human beings.

As we listen “with the ear of our heart” (Rule of Benedict, Prologue), we are offered the pregnant space in which to respond to what we hear.

This Jubilee Year has surely been a joyous space in which to freely respond. Now we stand at a threshold. In [an article in this issue](#) of our *Bulletin*, the Brazilian Benedictine monk Marcelo Barros reminds us that a biblical jubilee has always offered three invitations, (1) to remember the Love which first captivated our heart, and to savor the journey already traveled; (2) to discover the grace of “today,” the present moment, listening for the invitation of the Spirit to us now; and (3) to prepare for a new stage in the community's life.

Brother Marcelo then asks, “What challenge will a new century propose to our monastic living? How can we strengthen our fidelity to the values of the Gospel and to the monastic way of life in the world today?” Rekindling the “first love” calls us to embrace, more deeply than ever, the *prophetic* dimension of monastic life.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-208 C.E.) offers this beautiful image: “The Father has two ‘hands,’ the Word and the Spirit,” who embrace creation with unrelenting mercy.

It is into our very broken world, filled with so much disaster and so much hope, that God persists in sending a personal Word of love. Now, “today,” “when time has come to its fullness,” Jesus the Word bears the Spirit of *tikkun 'olam* to every person, to all creation. We too are summoned to become such a word of mercy.

The early church liked to call Jesus “the Precursor of the Holy Spirit” who would be poured out over the world. As in the synagogue in Nazareth, when he proclaimed God's Jubilee Year to all who would hear, he addresses us today with a rallying cry for our prophetic vocation:

“The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me.
God has sent me to bring good news to the poor [...],
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of God's favor. [...]
Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”
(Luke 4: 18—19, 21).

One hears echoes in the words of the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda:

“I would like to do with you,
what spring does with a cherry tree.”

This Christmas, may we all be awakened, by the Word, to that Love which first captivated us, and — enlivened by the ever-young Spirit — may we respond by bringing this world to flower!

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The Monks of Weston Priory
58 Priory Hill Road, Weston, VT 05161-6400
Tel: 802-824-5409; Fax: 802-824-3573