

WHATDOES ELIJAH SEE WHAT DOES JESUS SEE

This past week I participated in a healing retreat at the Malvern Retreat House. There were fifty-five retreatants. There was time for confession, for prayer—personal and communal. There were times for spiritual direction and anointing of the sick or those wounded by life. There was Mass each day. On the final night, Father Dermot and I carried the Blessed Sacrament in the Monstrance around to each retreatant. Jesus was once again walking among his people. It was very moving. I was so struck by the faith of these ordinary people. I had heard a lot of their stories or their confessions. I know how much emotional and spiritual pain there was there. But joy and hope and really deep faith too.

One woman, slight of frame asked to speak with me. She was older than I and in many ways alone in the world. She was troubled not by any recent sin but by things she had done in the past and how those things were still haunting her many years later. She indicated she had tried to rid herself of them. She had prayed. She had struggled. She had failed. Now, here she was, coming yet one more time. “Is there any help for me?” After all these years? I asked her, in her heart of hearts, if she really believed she could rid herself of these thoughts and feelings. She looked at me and said, “Father I really don’t think I can.” “Are you saying you don’t think you can fix yourself?” “Yes, I think so.” “Well then there really is something that can be done to help you.

I then recounted for her my own struggles with addiction to alcohol thirty-five years ago. I tried so hard but ultimately failed to fix myself. I failed to bring my alcohol use under my own control. It was out of control. I was out of control. I spoke to this woman about how I knelt before the Lord. In my room. And I said, “Lord I need you to take this away from me because I cannot do it. I do not know how. I do not have the strength. But I know it has to leave. Or I will die.” And the Lord removed my attachment to alcohol. It has never returned. Thirty-five years.

So I said to the woman. Can you admit before the Lord right now that you want this out of your life? Can you ask the Lord to do for you what you cannot do for yourself? Will you trust that the Lord will do this for you? She answered “Yes” to each question. And then we prayed together for the Lord to do just what she hoped for, just what she desired, just what she needed but could not do for herself. The tears were running down her cheeks and my cheeks. She was small of frame. I sensed that she believed she had nothing to give the Lord. I sensed she felt herself unworthy even to approach him.

And then I was touched by the Elijah story and that widow. She had nothing. A little flour. A couple of twigs. And then death. The prophet speaks a word of direction to her. Make me a little scone. “There is not enough for me to do that and feed my son and myself,” is her reply. I have so little. The prophet’s word to her is simple but direct. Do what I ask. Give what you have to the Lord. I bring you not only his word. I bring you life. And she did what he asked. And the prophet stayed in her home and there was ample food each day for the next year/

Then there is Jesus sitting by the Temple treasury observing another little woman. Poor. Who puts in her last two cents. Almost meaningless in the light of all the big money offerings others were putting in. But not to Jesus. That woman gave the last she had. She held nothing

back. Jesus saw her meager contribution not as meager but as most generous. She who thought she had nothing to give the Lord had just given her everything to the Lord.

Is not that how we all feel sometimes? That we too are little? That our efforts are futile, useless? They make no difference. That we cannot rid ourselves of the things that burden us? And we cannot. BUT. That does not mean that we cannot be rid of them. We must turn these things over to Our Lord. We must ask him to take away those things that lie heavy on our hearts or bother our conscience or afflict our memories. Only the Lord can liberate us. Only the Lord can deliver us. But that is precisely why he came. That is precisely what he desires to do. Let us ask him. Let us resolve to turn whatever it is that weighs us down, over to Him. Let us ask for deliverance. Let us trust in him.

A prayer. Bow your heads and pray along with me in your hearts.

Lord Jesus. We who are here this day are like these widows, like this woman on Retreat. We have been wounded by life. Wounded by others. Wounded by ourselves. We have asked forgiveness. We have even confessed our sins. Sometimes we are still weighed down. We want to be set free. We cannot do this on our own strength or merely by our own efforts. So, we turn to you in this very moment and in our hearts we will name that certain something that lies heavy upon us, that has wearied us, wearied our souls. And we ask you into our lives. We ask you to remove what does not belong in us. We ask you to remove what burdens us. Please lighten our load. Please restore the joy of our youth. Please restore us to original innocence. Please set us free from this particular compulsion or addiction. Please heal our heart. Please heal our soul. Please heal our memory. Please heal me O Lord as you have healed so many down through the years. We ask you this O Lord because we who gather here this day are the little ones, the widows and the spiritually poor who are so in need of your healing touch and your liberating power. In Jesus' name we pray.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.