



Easter 4 A, Good Shepherd – May 15, 2011

A Homily preached by the Very Rev'd Robert Pynn

Hermon Hesse in his book *Journey To The East*, tells the story of a band of men on a journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who is servant to the travelers. He does their menial chores and also sustains them with his songs. He is a person of extraordinary presence. All goes well until he leaves them. The group then falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned. They are somehow unable to make it without their servant.

The narrator, who is one of the group, after some years of wandering finds Leo and is taken into the religious order that had originally sponsored the journey. There he discovers that Leo, whom he had first known as a servant, was the head of the order and its guiding spirit.

what Hesse is saying in story form is that a great leader must be seen as a servant first. That simple fact is the key to his or her greatness.

The great hymn in Philippians reveals this as a truth about the very nature of Christ and his mission.

...though he was in the form of God
he did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a servant,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death---
even death on a cross.

For Jesus and for us self-emptying precedes the exaltation as in his life descent into the nether regions preceded ascension into the heavens. This is the imagery of servant leadership. It is not an idealistic cliché of power it represents its very shape and form.

Today's Gospel describing the Good Shepherd is a fundamental metaphor for integrative power. You will remember that "shepherd", as well as referring to those who tend sheep, is also a biblical code word for tribal leadership.

SERVANT and LEADER are one in the scriptures and this is an operating principle for all who would seek the mind of Christ Jesus. Leadership is always a function of servant hood.

Even in the great medieval ecclesiastical hierarchy this was intended. Every ordained leader began as a deacon-----a servant and stays a servant. Everyone ordained was to remain a deacon. This first ordination was to be the fundamental of every succeeding level from priest to pope and it was to remain each levels intentional core.

In the second chapter of Philippians the name above every name is not confessed until every head and knee bow to the kenotic (self emptying, non clinging) action of

"obedience unto death". This is the source of creative power that transforms and unites all things with their true destiny.

Every organization, including the church needs power people. We need movers and shakers, people who are able to transfer sacred energy into the life of the community. The problem is that our attitudes about power are ambiguous.

Some see power as inherently evil or at least unspiritual. At the same time we all in some secret way desire it. Unfortunately most of us don't think very much about the nature of power itself.

If we continue to overlook positive power and remain captive to negative or destructive concepts of power our leadership crisis will just deepen. The irony is that so many of us continue to hold concepts of destructive power at the level of our unexamined assumptions even as we consciously articulate positive notions of servant hood and mission. At the core is a misapprehension that power is really finite and therefore must be the object of contention, possession and protection at all costs.

This kind of egoic power produces behaviour patterns characterized by:

- "I win - you lose"
- strong feelings of status and prestige
- a need to be in control and dominate
- a need to make others submissive and dependent
- a tendency to treat others like pawns, not origins

In the Iona Community hymn, *Before the World Began*, there is another vision of power.

" Before the world began one Word was there;
grounded in God he was, rooted in care;
by him all things were made, in him was love displayed;
through him God spoke, and said, 'I am for you'."

This is a power that is not a finite quantity to be possessed. It is a universal reality that increases as it is given away. It is God's power with us, God's power for us, God's powerful love in us.

It is power exercised by people with and for the benefit of others. It honours the dignity of every human being. It enables their healing, their becoming, their ascension as lovers of God and neighbour. It is this love that charismatically inspires others to action. It creates confidence and trust. It makes people feel like creators not pawns!

Among us the leaders and the led always share the same search for Love's energy transfer. We are all pilgrims of the one God who found in human form shows us the way of salvation. Christ as servant does not choose the way of coercion, domination or manipulation. Christ rather chooses challenge, self-sacrifice, and invitation.

What then is the greatest enemy to our movement towards a servant community inspired by true servant leaders?

The enemy is not evil people, not stupid people or apathetic people, not the "system", not the protesters, the disrupters, the revolutionaries or the reactionaries.

To have fewer evil, stupid or apathetic people and to have a better system would make things easier; but the real enemy is foolish(undiscerning) thinking on the part of good, intelligent, vital people and their failure to be or to follow leaders who are true servants.

In short, the enemies are strong, natural servants, many of whom have the potential to lead but do not lead, who settle for less and champion the mediocre, who choose to follow shepherds whose objective is to exploit and to breed destruction.

The recent conviction of Bishop Raymond Layhey for child pornography brings to mind the seeming legion of sexual abuse cases involving clerical shepherds of the Church. This corruption of responsible, compassionate service sweeps away the bedrock of trust that enables leaders to serve and lead.

"The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep!"

The image of the shepherd as gate is profound in this context. The shepherd literally used to place his body across the entrance to the sheepfold. His very body was the barrier between the sheep and the dark outer valley of predators. His body was also their opening to the green pastures of abundant life beyond the fold.

Jesus' power is based on his radical self-emptying of any clinging desire for disintegrative power and control. He followed a path greater than caring solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized.

At his core burned a radical love born of a mystical union with all human beings in whose likeness and form he was found.

In an essay entitled "A Member of the Human Race" Thomas Merton recalls his own initiation into this way of Love's deep union.

"In Louisville, at the corner of 4th and Walnut, in the middle of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I was theirs"

For a moment he said that his sense of separateness melted and he was at one, in the heart of God with the whole of human kind. Kenosis and union are the path of Love's true service.

Then my friends:

Let every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord who yielded the glory that of right was his so that in our darkened hearts God's servant power might shine.

Alleluia, Alleluia