

**Fifth Sunday of Lent**  
**(Is. 43:16-21; Phil. 3: 8-14; Jn. 8: 1-11)**

At the heart and core of Jesuit spirituality lays the firm belief that one can find God in all things. Imagine my surprise, however, to think that the theme of today's gospel might be approached through the lens of a verbal interchange between Bill O'Reilly and his guest, of all people, the comedian Dennis Miller. I can't say that I have ever even watched the O'Reilly Factor, but the other night as I was flipping through the dial I was intrigued to see the unlikely pairing of two such disparate personalities.

I stayed with the show long enough to hear O'Reilly ask Miller, "From your liberal perspective, do you think that the recent flap between Rudy Giuliani and his son will have a negative impact on his campaign for president?" Miller responded saying, "Whoa, the last thing I feel I can comment on is a matter concerning dysfunction within any family. What son doesn't have issues with his father? What family lives in such a glass house that they would feel so secure and so confident as to pass judgment on how other families should behave?"

Instead of giving up something for Lent, this year I decided to make a more concerted effort to find God in all things, especially in those simple events of ordinary day to-day-life such as the random interchange on television the other night. I also decided to pair up the weeks of Lent with the weeks of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. I don't know why I never thought of that before, but I can happily share with you that it has been quite a fruitful and interesting experience. In the first week of the Exercises, Ignatius invites us to come to the realization that each of us is a sinner and yet infinitely loved by God. Even in our brokenness God knows us for who we are and loves us anyway. God's love never ceases.

I should not have been surprised therefore that in the first week of Lent, I received an enormous confirmation of Ignatius' insight when I picked up Calvin Trillin's recently published reflection about his wife entitled *About Alice*. As I am sure many of you know, Trillin writes for the *New Yorker* and the *Nation*. His wife, Alice, passed away five years ago. In this extremely moving memoir, he recalls how the two of them volunteered together during several summers at Paul Newman's "Hole in the Wall Gang Camp" for disabled children. Trillin wrote, Alice would always gravitate towards the child who needed the most help. One summer she found a girl named L. L had multiple disabilities. One prevented her from growing, another prevented her from eating. She had to be fed each night through a tube. Nonetheless, Alice found that L was one of the most cheerful, optimistic, and fun loving children she had ever encountered.

One afternoon, L asked Alice to hold her mail as she made her way into the circle to play a round of "duck-duck goose." Knowing that it would take her some time to make her way around the circle, Alice did something of which she was not proud. She read the letter that L's mother had written to her. I just had to know, Alice recalled, what a parent could say to a child that would render her so amazing. The mother wrote, "L if God gave your father and I the choice of all the children in the world, we would only choose you."

Alice turned to me and said, "Quick read this. It is the secret of life." Isn't wonderful and reassuring to know that in all our own brokenness and dysfunction God would say the same thing to us!

During the second week of Lent, it was a passage from Matthew's gospel that really spoke to me. In the second week of the Exercises, Ignatius invites us to accompany Jesus and get to know better the one who loves us so much. If we want to follow Jesus we must be like him. He tells us how when he says, "You know how those who exercise authority among the Gentiles lord it over them; their great ones make their importance felt. It cannot be that way with you. Anyone among you who aspires to greatness must serve the rest, and whoever wants to rank first among you, must serve the needs of all." That insight was certainly enough to pray over for a week!

During the third week of Lent, a Jesuit film maker, whom I know very well, gave me a DVD of the documentary that he had just completed on the subject of illegal immigration in Texas and California. In the third week of the exercise, Ignatius invites us to be present with the suffering Christ upon the cross.

The situations that he chronicled in his documentary poignantly paralleled what we recently saw here in Massachusetts concerning our neighbors living in New Bedford. In reflecting and praying on this topic, it was easy to be with Christ on the Cross.

Today we begin another week of Lent. Our first reading and our gospel echo a common theme poetically articulated by Isaiah: "Remember not the events of the past -- the things of long ago consider not; see I am doing something new. In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers. I form my chosen people, that they might announce my praise."

The fourth week of the Spiritual Exercises invites us to savor the risen Christ and to see the joy that he brings into the world by making all things new in himself.

Our gospel gives us a glimpse of precisely how that happens. Here we see Jesus encountering a crowd surrounding a woman caught in adultery. Like them Jesus knows her past, but unlike them, he does not condemn her. He sees her only in the present tense and dares to imagine what she, as a child of God, might and could be in the future.

All too often, we measure ourselves only by externals or as locked in by a hard and fixed set of circumstances created by our past. In essence, when we encounter a little girl like L we see only her disabilities. More so we have become experts at seeing others -- whether it be family members, co-workers or others in the world not in terms of what they could be, but only as prisoners of our unwavering prejudices and long standing preconceptions. All too often, we remember only the events of the past, the things of long ago and we will not let go. We simply do not allow ourselves to imagine something new.

In the first of the Lenten prefaces the priest prays: "Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed." In the remaining weeks of the Lent, let us take up that invitation to renew our hearts and

minds seriously. Lent should be easy for us since we as Christians, know how it all ends. Easter joy awaits us.

It is the very same joy of which the German poet Friedrich Schiller writes in the second stanza of his famous ode that Beethoven put to music in finale of his ninth symphony. As the music swells the chorus bursts forth:

<i>Deine Zauber binden wieder, Was die Mode streng geteilt;</i>	[joy] Thy magic reunites those Whom stern custom has divided;
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<i>Alle Menschen werden Bru"der, Wo dein sanfter Flu"gel weilt.</i>	All men will become brothers Under thy gentle wing.
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My experience of Lent this year confirms that God can indeed be found in all things. Throughout these forty days the readings from scripture are literally a school for the spiritually blind. They invite us to open our eyes and free ourselves from all that holds us captive.

The next time you pass through Watertown, say a prayer of thanksgiving when you drive by those green signs hung on the light poles for Perkins School for the Blind – Those banners proclaim the school's motto, which might just as well serve as a rallying cry for those who have experienced true Easter joy: "Perkins School for the Blind: All we see are possibilities!"

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