God's Ways Are Not Our Ways

By Jennifer Gregory Miller (bio - articles - email) | May 24, 2017 | In The Liturgical Year

My youngest brother, Joe, received a grim health diagnosis of ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease) this week, and all of my family is reeling at this news. He is young (35), married and with 4 children.

Trying to make sense out of this suffering is difficult. I was in church praying and crying. My reply came as I viewed the image of Christ hanging on the crucifix. Loving Christ and His Church means imitation of Christ, even to His suffering and death. It is only through grace can we understand this sign of contradiction, as St. Paul said, "We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor 1:23-25). It doesn't always make it easier to bear, especially coming on the heels of my cousin's death from cancer.

My thoughts continually go to one of my favorite passages of the Bible:

> **Isaiah 55:8-9:** For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
> neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
> so are my ways higher than your ways
> and my thoughts than your thoughts.

There are various interpretations of this passage, but what always comes to my mind is from a book of reflections on the beatitudes entitled *Blessed Are You* by Mother Mary Francis. Mother Mary Francis was the Mother Superior of the Poor Clares in Roswell, New Mexico. I enjoy all her writings, but this book is one of my favorites. (It is out of print, but you can order it from the Poor Clares.)

In her section on being "Poor in Spirit," Mother reflects on this passage. Living this beatitude means having a Christ-like flexibility and vulnerability. She describes what it means to being poor in spirit when our plans turn upside down or God sends challenges:

The poor in spirit greet the day with wonder, expecting surprises if only and precisely because they come from God, and perhaps especially so when that alone gives reason for any delight. The inflexible, those who desire invulnerability, are made sullen by surprises. If we approach the day as person truly poor in spirit, alive with a sense of anticipation: "What does the day hold?" we also begin to experience something of a divine sense of humor. We get glimmers of understanding that, in truth, God's ways are not our ways nor his thoughts our thoughts; but that as far as the heavens are above the earth, so God's thoughts are above the thoughts of men." (Is. 55:8-9). It is a

profound scriptural declaration, yes, and appropriately solemn. Yet is it not also replete with humor? Is it not really a delicious saying? I sometimes wonder whether the inspired writer did not have a genially wry smile on his face as he set down those words.

"God writes straight with crooked lines" is another way of putting it! This quote has stuck with me these 20-plus years. I need to remind myself that God is in control. I must relinquish the reins and embrace whatever He sends. And with great joy, not grudgingly!

These are thoughts I need to keep in mind especially for the challenges my brother and our family faces. Being poor in spirit is having trust and confidence in God. I'm trying to be open and vulnerable and relinquish control. I write our plans, and He will help in implementation, although it might look different than the way I had originally thought.

May God send us the graces to always keep in mind that His ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts. May we embrace that poverty in spirit and anticipate His plans for us with great delight and flexibility!

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