

FOR FRANK MORRISEY - A LITURGICAL AND PERSONAL MEMORY

Introduction

The last time I was with Frank (you will excuse me if I refer to Father Francis Morrisey as Frank. As Oblates, Frank and I have been fellow pilgrims here in Ottawa and elsewhere since October, 1962). The last time I visited with Frank was before lunch on Sunday, 29th March, 2020. As usual, he was rocking in his famous armchair; we were solving a few intractable problems at Saint Paul University, in the Church and world. The next day he was in hospital never to return to his armchair.

I spoke with him several times in palliative care. Seeing that I could not visit, I made him a promise that I would pray the *Magnificat* in his name every day. Praying with Mary, I was drawn to fix my gaze on the Almighty, who has done great things for Mary. The same God has done great things for Jesus, for Frank, for us all, for creation - happening over and over again now.

Funeral liturgy, indeed all liturgy, is a celebration and a eulogy of the Almighty, a form of story-telling which with time can become an epiphany of God's presence and care now - wiping away the tears of mourning. The falling leaves of autumn are the tears of an expectant creation in mourning.

I wanted a clue to Frank's awareness of the Almighty in his life. So, I consulted the People of God with this question: tell me a few of Frank's favorite biblical texts? Maybe I was synodal without knowing it! Two came to the fore: the *Beatitudes* and the *Road to Emmaus* - the story to which we have just listened. The more I ponder the story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the more I recognize the common presence and working of the Almighty in the lives of Jesus the Christ and his disciple Frank.

Journeys

The scene is set for a biblical and liturgical paralleling of their two stories. I will spare you a paraphrase of Jesus on the road to Emmaus. I will focus on two points of convergence. The first: how the Almighty had gifted both Jesus and Frank for a ministry of itinerant preacher. The second: how the dinner table functioned frequently for both as a domestic pulpit.

First of all, to the travel stories of Jesus and Frank. After patiently listening to the two disciples going on and on about the recent death of Jesus the Nazarene, Jesus shares his version of what happened when the presence, the power and weakness of the Almighty is recognized as an actor in the recent events of his life: at the last Supper, in the garden of Gethsemane, before high priest, king and governor, on Calvary, and at the empty tomb. Two verses stand out: *Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures.* In so doing, he transforms the story of humanity. With the empty tomb, the Almighty creates a community with a new story for everyone.

Today's liturgy, the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, invites us to retell the story of Frank's missionary life. We can all testify that he was the bearer of a treasury of gifts. On one gift I will dwell - a pearl of great price entrusted to the hands of Frank: his unleashing of the liberating power of law. Frank gives canon law a good reputation. His command of the Code, his lucidity of mind, his compassion of heart, brought and brings new hope, new freedom, and new ability to the lives of multitudes - am I exaggerating? All summed up in Frank's mantra: saving souls! That was his answer when I would ask what he was doing in Sydney, Singapore, Bangkok, or Killarney. Only God knows the height, the length, the breadth and the depth of the good unleashed by Frank's ministry.

Festive Tables

Now to the tables - their secular pulpit. I recall a throwaway comment attributed to Timothy Ratcliffe, Dominican, that "Jesus eats his way through the Gospel of St. Luke". (I don't know whether Timothy Ratcliffe ever made this comment, but he would have had he thought of it!) You only have to thumb your way through the Gospel of Saint Luke to see how often Jesus speaks of meals or sits down to the fellowship of the table. Just a few examples: his sitting down with Pharisees and sinners, hosted at their banquet table; at the table of Zacchaeus; at the table of Martha and Mary; at the last paschal meal with his disciples; and at the inn close to Emmaus. And, I cannot leave out the fatted calf on the festive table for the Prodigal Son, and the dogs scrambling for crumbs under the table of the rich man and Lazarus. His actions and words give a glimpse of what life is like in the Kingdom of heaven. Glimpses - welcome, listening, not condemning, forgiving, healing, valuing the person irrespective of gender, race, social standing, faith, occupation, or the judgement of others.

Dare I say to you that, among us, Frank's ministry at the table was not unknown - always a celebration, always a banquet worthy of the Kingdom. Table fellowship is either a sacrilege or a sacrament: a sacrilege when it masks self-interest, a sacrament when it becomes an epiphany of divine hospitality. Frank's dinners revealed glimpses of the Kingdom of heaven - in his welcome, his listening, his joy in being with others, his joy in the gift of their presence, revealing their worth, his help in solving what weighed on his guests' hearts. And throughout it all, his humility shown through - it was not a matter of his gifts, but gifts held in trust from the hands of the one he prayed to with Jesus, as Abba, Father.

This liturgy is a time of celebration, a balm for the pain that still weighs on our hearts. It is a eulogy of the Almighty who has done great things through the life and mission of Frank. He who is mighty has done great things through Frank.

Conclusion

Let me end with a little anecdote. Frank came from deep Irish roots - the Morriseys and the Coadys. So, did you expect to escape without a quotation from an Irish poet? *William Butler Yeats*.

The family and followers of Jesus, thinking that his self-giving was excessive, wondered whether he was crazy. In Frank's community, as fellow Oblates, we often felt that his zeal and

self-giving were, to say the least, worrying. Were either Jesus or Frank justified in the length of their extra mile?

Yeats had similar concern about the deaths of the leaders of the 1916 Rising in Dublin, Ireland, in his poem, *Easter 1916*. He pondered whether their deaths could ever be justified. He left us this pithy line: *And what if excess of love/ Bewildered them till they died.*

Frank, you did indeed bewilder us; but who are we to judge your excess of love!

Eugene King, O.M.I.
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