Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle C

OSP 2016 (11:15)

It is not often that one finds in the Sunday readings

A series of timely and practical suggestions

For making our way in the world

But on this 4th of July weekend

What one blogger called the equivalent

Of the “American Easter”

We seem to get very practical travel advice

From Jesus who himself is on the road

I don’t know if you have heard the predictions

But AAA projects that because U.S. drivers

Have saved about $20 billion on gas so far this year

Compared to last year

Nearly 43 million Americans will be traveling this weekend

Most of them by car

Maybe you’re one of them

Given our national mobility this weekend

It could sound as though

Jesus is giving us the gospel equivalent

Of TSA tips

To make our travel more enjoyable and efficient.

Credit cards are obviously safer and less bulky

Than carrying a bag of money through security

lack of sandals - or any shoes for that matter

Would make the full body screening easier

Maybe even more, however, is that great tip

And that is to travel light

Now there are a lot of good reasons

For trying to travel light

Over the past few weeks I’ve been listening

To a the bestselling biography of Genghis Khan

By Jack Weatherford

While often imagined as a ruthless, bloodthirsty savage

The book - subtitled “the making of the modern world”

Reveals Khan as a leader much more progressive

Than his western counterparts, Abolishing torture

Granting universal religious freedom

And eliminating the system of aristocratic privilege

He was also one heck of a military tactician

A kind of Mongolian Alexander the Great

And one of his tactics was to travel light

And travel fast

The originator of a strategy later known as the blitzkrieg

His huge armies traveled with leather armor

No supply wagons, extra horses

Living lightly off the land, and striking his foes

With unexpected speed and agility

There is certainly something tactical about disciples traveling light

But I am not sure it is for the sake of surprise

As though going to sneak up on people at Taste, or Cubs game

And shove an OSP flyer in their hand

Before they knew what hit them

Rather, in a subversive twist

Jesus directs his disciples to travel light

So that they might be open, even pressured into

accepting whatever hospitality was given to them

I recently traveled to southwest Africa, Namibia

To do some teaching for a former student and her community

Because I have almost a religious conviction

About only doing carry-on when I travel

I had to travel light

When traveling consider hand sanitizer

Something of a sacramental

But my 100 milliliters was almost depleted

After my 40 hour transit

After I collected my baggage

Which the flight out of London required me to check

And climbing into the nun-mobile for our trip to the priory

Guess what was in the door rack next to my seat?

Water, candy, wipes and sanitizer - Hallelujah

Besides being more receptive of creature comforts from potential hosts

Traveling light in a spiritual sense

Also renders us more receptive to their ideas

Their needs, their dreams and even their beliefs

It renders us receptive to Muslims explaining their concepts

Of Allah and Mohammed and Jesus

It renders us receptive to immigrants

Narrating their stories of displacement, suffering and hope

And it even renders us more receptive to the unaffiliated

As they explain no interest in church, synagogue, mosque

Traveling light spiritually opens us to the real possibility

To what some call mission in reverse

Or the possibility that encountering the other

Will actually be a gracious, maybe even divine revelation

And we might actually encounter

The Holy Spirit, lurking in places ... and in people

We might least expect

That might be one way to understand what Paul meant

When he would only boast in the crucified Christ

The empty Christ

For in that emptiness ... weakness ... profound loss

Fullness of life might be found

To be a disciple who travels with such spiritual lightness

Of course requires some imagination

Now this might sound like a somewhat superficial exercise

Except when we reckon with archaeologists and other scientists

Who posit that the development of a complex imagination

Actually contributed to the evolution of *homo sapiens*

For example, Steven Mithen is an archaeologist

At the university of Reading in the UK

In his book *The Prehistory of the Mind*

Mithen uses the language of cognitive fluidity

To describe how the primate mind

Which was much more modular

less capable of combining different types of knowledge

evolved into a more fluid, creative, integrated mind

that could take different knowledges

and combine them in new a useful ways

Mithen argues that such cognitive fluidity

Such abilities for imagination

Were determinative for the very emergence of humanity

And foundational for the birth of art, science and religion

You may not have ever thought about it this way

But imagination is essential

To grasp the very center of Jesus’ teaching

Entrusted to the disciples in today’s gospel

In which they are called to proclaim

The very kingdom of God.

It is a concept that Jesus never explicitly explains

But exemplifies in his parables and in the parable of his life

A vision of a new society in which justice reigns

And peace endures

Based on an unshakeable belief

In the value and worth of every living creature

The reign of God is an imaginary

Not in the sense of some phantasm

But in sense that philosophers like Charles Taylor explain

“a broad understanding of the way people imagine

Their collective social or religious life”

In that sense, our Creed is a religious imaginary

All preaching is attempt to create such a religious imaginary

As is our worship: inviting people into not only believing in

But working toward realizing God’s reign here and now

In some ways one could argue that the concept of the USA

That we celebrate with such vigor this weekend

Is also a form of social imaginary

A collective vision of what it means to live together

*E pluribus unum*

A nation of immigrants

A place of religious tolerance

A home for ... what does it say on the statue of liberty?

Your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,

I would contend that this social imaginary under attack today

From the outside ...

Terrorists who reject our open, hybrid, dynamic society

And from the inside

By those who preach a new kind of nativism

And fire the flames of xenophobia

Roman Catholic philosopherRichard Kearney from Boston College

Has suggested that modern genocides and atrocities

Presuppose a failure of imagination

If we are unable to imagine the world or suffering of the other

If we believe that my world is the only world

And the other is to be feared and eradicated

Then destruction & erasure of the other is not only possible

But relatively easy

The opposite is an empathetic imagination

One that allows us to enter the world of another

Something that Vatican II announced

that the Church must do, when in opening *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on Church in Modern world, taught

*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.*

Mark Twin once wrote “You can’t depend on your eyes

When your imagination is out of focus”

Jesus reveals today, and so often in the gospel

That the divine imagination is pointedly in focus

Focused on God’s reign of justice and peace

That welcomes gentiles and Jews

Saints and sinners

Women and men to the Jesus banquet

An invitation expanded by Pope Francis

Who extends that welcome

To people of every sexual orientation

Religion, and even non-belief

For all have a place in God’s reign

Before he died, Muhammad Ali suggested that

“the one who has no imagination has no wings”

On this festal weekend, when the imaginary we call the USA

Is under duress, and our empathetic imagination

in danger of having its wings clipped

During this brutal election year

We reassert the empathetic imaginary

Revealed to us as the Reign of God

And in the hope of restoring through imagination

A renewed hope in God and country

We ing an old hymn in a new mode

for a future we long to see

God bless the world we love,  
Stranger and friend,  
Go before us, restore us  
With a hope that despair cannot end.  
Ev’ry people, ev’ry nation,  
Mighty ocean, heaven’s dome.  
God bless the world we love                                      
Our fragile home.  
God bless the world You love,  
Our fragile home.