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.