

Proper 7 Year C

In the name of the one God, "...Il miglior fabbro"
 Creator Redeemer and Sanctifier.....

More about those Italian words later...The Adult Sunday school class here at All Saints has begun a six weeks study of poetry, led by Rob Gray... a study of poetry mostly British and American...some poems familiar...and some not...the premise being that one may through art and in this case poetry...one through art may encounter the divine, the beautiful, the true....the eternal through means that some would label secular... but I would argue that when the imagination is at work, anything and everything it touches becomes sacred, or perhaps better said is recognized as sacred...the imagination, an echo of the heart and mind of the divine.... Coleridge thought as much in his equating the human imagination with the Holy Spirit. The church I believe can be informed mightily by the arts. That's why this study is such a good thing.

So in preparing for this class...I'm there to cheer Rob on.... in preparing I've been reading poetry lately...read the poems assigned for this week and some others...all familiar to me...but all so different now since the last time I read them....I've changed, the world has changed.... and therefore the poems have changed...there is nothing permanent in art... or in life for that matter...because the whole of it is still in its becoming; the world still through the imagination being rendered intelligible.... Just after reading Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* this past week, I received out of the blue an e-mail from Amazon.com....who used to specialize in selling books on line, but now they sell everything.... I got one of their sophisticated marketing e-mails....you know the ones that go something like this....hello Jim Flowers....as one who has purchased books on theology, poetry, and quantum theory...we thought perhaps you would be interested in blank....well "blank" happened to be, in one of those synchronistic moments, the eerie coincidences we encounter...the title of the book happened to be *God, the Poet of the World; A Study of Process Theologies*. What a way to speak of God I thought....God as poet... God the source of imagination, speaking artfully the world into being... still speaking, still improvising, editing, crossing out verses....stumped at a premise...new images begotten...new revelation...God the poet imagining still the world as God sees it....or more aptly, as God imagines the world to be.

This reminds me of an old premise of mine, that I learned somewhere...that to read scripture properly, one must read it with the eye of the poet...through the lens of the imagination....without imaginative engagement with scripture to discern the profound beauty and truth contained between the pages of Genesis and Revelation....without a critical imaginative eye then scripture becomes absurd and irrelevant. I had a theology professor once who said of the Nicene Creed, that it should be sung and not said...getting at the same point.... the imagination shapes and reshapes...and makes beauty anew...forever anew.

So let's look at our reading from Luke in this way....a familiar story, the exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac.....a story that over the ages has been re-depicted in art and music and literature.... so let's read this story with a poet's eye, read the poetry of God and see what we find; what might God be telling us amid artifice; what might God be telling us in God's art....in the previous passage in Luke immediately preceding ours for today Jesus and his disciples have just crossed Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee) from Jewish territory into gentile territory... how do we know it is gentile?...because the people living there are tending pigs....but in the journey across the lake, Jesus and the disciples encounter a terrible thunderstorm that almost

swamps the boat....and you know the story, Jesus calls a halt to the storm and all is well....Jesus commanding the waters as God commands the waters in the beginning, in the creation narratives... that's really the first stanza in the poem...the ordering of water...so we're hearing a poem about creation, right?....so now stanza two: they arrive in gentile country to encounter a man crazed by demons.....demons the man names legion, a pun surely not lost on anyone of the day...the day of being occupied by Rome...a Roman legion contained some 6000 soldiers, who contrary to calming seas are wreaking havoc across the land, raping, plundering, imprisoning and murder....so the imagery is getting rich here....and we are also told that the man is homeless, naked and living in a graveyard....images of uncleanness to a Jew, violations of purity....this man is the ultimate figure, *symbol*...we've decided this is a poem after all...this man is the epitome of indignity...utterly cut off from his community....being cut off from community we are now finding is a principal theme for Luke.

So stanza three, the climax in this poem....the imagery, the scene fantastic...the legion of demons are driven into a herd of pigs... Luke rolling all of this impurity into a ball....and they are sent to drown in the sea, the chaos from which they came....and to emphasize the drama, Luke tells us that the people of the town were so afraid they asked Jesus and his friends to leave.

And then the concluding stanza....the man is sent back to his home to tell of such beauty... being lost and being found...being sick and made whole....rising from abject indignity to the dignity of being reclaimed by his community....this is a poem about restoration....and not just about one soul, but about a community, a people, a world....and the stanzas continue on...a woman healed in the next chapter....five thousand people fed...and the stanzas present in our own day....stanzas forever proclaiming outwardly and visibly restoration.

I think this is a fine poem by a fine poet....now I'm not saying God literally wrote this passage...God spoke the poem in the beginning...and it has been written, and will be rewritten, retold, forever, as if for the first time, the verses, a song of restoration moving over the face of the deep....God the poet... "il miglior fabbro"...il miglior fabbro, the honorific T.S. Eliot bestowed upon Ezra Pound in his dedication of his opus, *The Wasteland*.... Ezra Pound, fellow poet, mentor and editor and collaborator on this epic poem...Il miglior fabbro means...the finest maker....the finest maker....the art of making, the art of creation, always a collaborative process... a process of imaginative improvisation, and that demands intelligent conversation and intelligent practice....and that is where we come in.

It is our legacy, dear people of God, to cross over into the margins of our world, storms notwithstanding, into the world of indignity, and speak and enact the art of restoration....and to make those lost places into places of beauty and dignity...that is what I think the poem means... that we bear the mantle now of, il miglior fabbro...the finest makers...and if not us who? It is our work, our vocation...this imagining the world into being....this editing...this speaking truth...this revising....this being stumped at a premise...this constant improvisation...crossing out and rewriting verses... and the articulation of new revelation...the world still being imagined into being...one stanza at a time....and know this:... this light of human imagination set to work, is quite enough, even in exponentially dramatic fashion, to send the powers of evil and indignity over a cliff to a watery grave....quite enough to render the created order beautiful and intelligible....this is the way of love...love God's greatest gift to us

Let us be about the high practice, the high art of love, for love knows only to renew and restore....Let us live the poem....Let us be about the high art of love, for there is no greater thing than to be one such poet....the finest maker.