



The Word...

In those days, the LORD said:

"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave,
that I must go down and see whether or not their actions
fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me.

I mean to find out."

(Gn 18:20-32; 19:1-11)

Pondering the Word ...

God hears the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah. From whom?

I'm not sure if anyone has suggested an answer to this question. One might assume it is the angel messengers who accompany God to visit Abraham and Sarah. Perhaps it could be some of the city residents themselves; the Hebrew word *tsa'aq* is often used in the Psalms to mean shrieks of torment. We know Abraham's nephew, Lot, is sitting at the city gate when the messengers arrive, perhaps to get away from the fray or to protect any strangers who wander through the gates. It might have been his prayers for salvation that God heard.

Not that this really matters. What matters is someone has the courage to cry out to God for help. They take a risk, going against the prevailing culture to call out the sins and injustices they witness.

Often, when we witness the sinfulness and injustice of rampant racism, gun violence, domestic abuse, bullying, political mayhem, and the like, we, like the Levite and priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan, move to the other side of the proverbial road. We don't want to be involved or, God forbid, take an unpopular stance that might earn us ridicule, responsibility, or worse. We shrug our shoulders in resignation. We may even pray for peace and a resolution. But crying out is a whole other story.

Are we willing – particularly those of us blessed with security in this life – to join our voices with those who suffer, those who are sinned against, to cry out with them in a very public and active way for help?

Living the Word... *"Apathy is the glove into which evil slips its hand."* (Bodie Thoene)

It is shocking to me how things that would have been unthinkable ten years ago occur with impunity today. Politicians committing perjury, inciting violence, a blatant disregard for human life, often by the very people who call themselves "pro-life." It boggles my mind. I admit there are times when I just want to walk away. Do you ever feel that way too?

It takes courage to take a stand. It takes courage to be a prophet and call out hypocrisy and wrongdoing when you see it. It took courage for Jesus to do just that, and as his followers, we are called to do that as well. Pray for courage. Take a stand for justice for those oppressed.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jul 25: *"Brothers and sisters: We hold this treasure in earthen vessels."* (2 Cor 4: 7-15) There's a parable called "The Cracked Pot." The king's gardener brings water from the river to the palace each day. He carries it in two earthen pots balanced on a stick across his shoulders. One of the pots has a small crack, so some water leaks out during the trek up the garden path. The cracked pot is embarrassed and sad. It apologizes to the gardener. The gardener, in turn, says to the pot, "Do you see all the beautiful flowers on your side of the path? They are there because you water them. Your imperfection brings the king great joy." **Reflection/ Provision:** We are the fragile, earthen vessels that carry the treasure of God's glory. Imperfect, even "cracked" at times, it's often through our weakness that others can experience God's beauty and strength. Pray with this image today.

Tue, Jul 26: *"The good seed the children of the Kingdom. The weeds are the children of the Evil One... The harvest is the end of the age."* (Mt 13:36-43) As I was reflecting on this, Sunday's OT reading came to mind: Abraham's repartee with God about sparing the innocent in Sodom and Gomorrah, even if it means the guilty are spared as well. The truth is that evil will always be with us, but I believe there is far more good seed still being sown and flourishing than there is bad seed. **Reflection/Provision:** I talk with so many people who wonder why lies, greed, power, and yes, even evil have taken over so much of our public discourse. Consider challenging yourself to avoid the newsfeed today and look for the good seed being sown in your own community.

Wed, Jul 27: *"The Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."* (Mt 13:44) Two things bother me about this verse, likely because I read way more into it than Jesus intends! It sounds like "finders, keepers, losers, weepers" and a bit deceptive. Wouldn't you feel obligated to tell whoever owned the land what you have found? The second thing: What if the land is not for sale? Remember the story in 1Kings of Ahab and Naboth? You're not going to resort to violence like Jezebel! What do you do? **Reflection/ Provision:** Good news: the Kingdom of heaven is portable; once you find it, you can take wherever you go! And if you happen to find it through another, they may not even be aware of what they have. Don't hide it. Imagine the joy of bringing them to discover it for themselves!

Thu, Jul 28: *"The Kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind... they haul it ashore and put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away."* (Mt 13:47-53) In his book, *Let Us Dream*, Pope Francis tells this story: "I met fishermen from the Italian town of San Benedetto del Tronto who told me...they had, in a year, hauled up twenty-four tons of garbage of which about half— twelve tons—was plastic. They've taken it upon themselves as a mission...so they gather the plastic and separate it on the boats." (pg 33) Twenty-four tons! And these are small fishing boats trawling in their little part of the Adriatic Sea. Jesus is again using a parable to explain the fate of the good and the evil, but I wonder: Will we be judged among the evil given what we have done to God's creation? **Reflection/Provision:** Perhaps we are like the people going on with lives before the flood. The reality of climate change is starkly evident, and yet still, some deny it. I'm sorry but billions of tons of trash in our oceans are not part of the natural climate cycle! Take responsibility. Make your voice heard to your elected officials. Try to stop buying products from irresponsible manufacturers. Do something good for the earth.

Fri, Jul 29: *"Why do you prophesy: 'This house shall be like Shiloh,' and 'This city shall be desolate and deserted'?"* (Jer 26:1-9) A follow-up to yesterday's reflection: there are prophets today telling us this earth shall be desolate and deserted. While the powers that be don't seek to put them to death, they do try to silence them by appealing to our immediate need, greed, and entitlement. **Reflection/Provision:** What prophets are you ignoring? Maybe it is not denial, but helplessness you feel. Take steps to learn what you can do and share that knowledge with others.

Sat, Jul 30: *The priests and prophets said to the princes and to all the people, "This man deserves death..." Thereupon the princes and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man does not deserve death."* (Jer 26: 11-16, 24) I imagine the people in this story are quite confused by their leaders. To whom do they listen? To whom do you listen? **Reflection/Provision:** Too many people these days seem to base their opinions on the last thing they heard. Our leaders complicate matters. We have but one Teacher, one Guide – the Spirit that leads our conscience. "Lord in your great love answer me." Take time in silence today to listen for God's answer for yourself.