

OSF General Assembly Closing Liturgy, 2024 I Thess. 5:16-24 Jn. 16:12-5

Today is the closing day of your General Assembly for 2024. I have little or no idea what goes on while you are assembled, what is discussed, debated, or affirmed. But I am going to guess that apart from any of that, one of the important parts of assembling is simply being together—speaking with and sharing with and reconnecting with Sisters whom you may not have seen for some time. I know that is the case for us diocesan priests when we gather in Convocation every two summers.

The *apostles* were assembled in the Upper Room as John recounts in today's gospel. They had been together with the Lord for most of three years. Now in that Upper Room, Jesus had washed their feet, telling them to serve one another. He had shared a meal with them, changing it forever: This is my body; this is my blood. Then he speaks to them, telling them to love one another, that he is going away, and that he will send them the Holy Spirit to be their Advocate.

Then he says “I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now.” Can you imagine how the disciples felt when he said that? After all they had been through and then being told they would have to wait even longer to hear the rest of what Jesus had to share with them. How difficult that wait must have been for them.

I would like to share with you a quote from the great Austrian poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke, who died in 1926 at the age of 51. In his “Letter to a Young Poet” he wrote this: “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves... Do not seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you

will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

I’m not sure that Rilke was a believer, [I suspect not] but I think his advice to the “young poet” is much along the line of what Jesus was saying in that upper room: Be patient, the Spirit will guide you to the truth. Questions aren’t bad. They may lead us to the Father. We don’t have to have all the answers. God does.

Like the apostles, most of us aren’t very good at waiting. Many of us anxiously wonder what comes next? For our world so divided and prone to violence... for our community with members leaving with Sister Death and few or no others entering... for us as individuals, whose physical and mental abilities are not what they once were... Many questions; do we need to have the answers? When the light at the end of the COVID tunnel started to shine, many of us couldn’t wait to get back to “normal.” But if now is normal, is it really what we want? Perhaps “normal” must be something very different, something that requires living the boldness of the Gospel.

Not knowing how things will work out, not being able to see how to get ourselves out of the messes we make, is not an easy place to be. But perhaps it is not a *bad* place to be. One of the things that always gives me a measure of hope is remembering how often I have been happily surprised at how well things turned out when they didn’t go the way I wanted or what I thought best.

And perhaps St. Paul’s advice which we heard this morning in his letter to the Thessalonians is even better than Rainer Maria Rilke’s. These few verses are proclaimed each year on Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent because of the very first word “Rejoice.”

Peter Kreeft, the philosopher and convert to Catholicism, points out that in these few short verses St. Paul gives 10 D's about holiness: three do's, three don'ts, three dimensions, and one definition. I won't go into all he says—that would be a graduate seminar. But he points out that the three do's are really pretty straightforward and relatively easy: Rejoice, Pray, Give thanks. Relatively easy except for the qualifiers: Always. Without ceasing. In all circumstances. Maybe not so easy. Holiness is not for the faint of heart. But the best part, the part which makes all the do's, don'ts and dimensions possible is the final verse, the end of Paul's prayer: "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will accomplish it." HE will accomplish it—not me, not you—HE will accomplish it. I guess that is what makes the waiting, the uncertainty not only bearable, but livable.

"May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blamelessly for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."