



Lent reflection for February 16, 2024

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A reading from John 17:9-19

I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Today's Reflection is by Jane Miller

"I am not praying for the world." I winced a little at that phrase. If there's anyone you'd want praying for literally everyone, it's Jesus. Instead, he uses the word "them", referring to the disciples, thirteen times in just this paragraph. That might sting a little at first.

This reading reminds me that I struggle, as I know many do, with trying to understand the balance- personally, in society, and in our religion, between the universal and the particular. Where does insularity or even selfishness begin on the spectrum between those things? What does it mean to belong to a faith that is grounded not first in abstract philosophical principles but in events that happened in one part of the world two thousand years ago? Does caring about one thing mean not caring about something else?

But flip it around- Jesus is doing what most of us do most of the time- which is thinking about, talking about, praying for the people we know or at least have things in common with. It's so human. Having considered it more, I find this passage a useful counterbalance to Christianity's more abstract calls to love one another. That commandment means more when you see that even for Jesus it was grounded in care for the specific people he traveled the way with. After all, the more you care about someone or something, the more their qualities are revealed.

More than that, I know that when you care for one person, it becomes easier to care for another and another. We are, in a sense, the things we're attached to, the things we care about, but those things need not be fixed. And for that reason, the universal and particular need not be seen as opposites but in a healthy symbiosis. And the concern that Jesus had for his disciples is a testament to that.



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