



Lent reflection for March 8, 2024

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1 Corinthians 9:16-27

If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a wage, but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. What then is my wage? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel.

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not outside God's law but am within Christ's law) so that I might gain those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air, but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Today's Reflection is by Alice Avouris

I want to take just one thing from this reading of St. Paul, and that is his intent, which is that he acts out of charity. There is much that distracts from this in the reading. One senses feelings that drive Paul which are not love. There is guilt for having been a persecutor of Jesus, there is the focus on self-sacrifice, and throughout, a frantic energy that is simply too much for me. It's exhausting to imagine being one of his Corinthian flock, at a reading of this passage.

But first, Paul was driven by love, which of course he defines elsewhere, unforgettably. And the fact that Christianity 'stuck' –as taught by Paul and the disciples – I firmly believe was not because he became chameleon-like (I have become all things to all people), or practiced self sacrifice (I punish my body and enslave it) or even refused a commission for preaching! (What's left? fire and brimstone?) I'm done with all that. I believe Paul taught, and by that word 'taught' I mean that what he attempted to teach actually stuck, by loving example.

Do you remember learning to tie your shoelaces? My patient grandmother took me through "loop, circle around and through" enough times to set me up for life with tied shoes. Those skinny, short, laces! And they were brown, on brown shoes. So strange. But my strongest memory is the feeling of love, sitting in her lap, looking down, and knowing she was there with me, helping me, teaching me.

Learning with love: This was the tenet of Suzuki – the early childhood teacher of violin, who was struck by the fact that very young children everywhere learn their mother tongue, so why not the violin? If enthusiasm in an effective teacher is a given, then love is essential for teaching. But again, what is teaching, really? Making a change, helping to grow, passing on knowledge.

We often say we learned something in 'the school of hard knocks,' or from a bad experience. Some of these memories we would rather erase, even to going through therapy.

When I was a student in the late 1960's at a large state university, we all had to take a natural sciences course (Nat Sci 101) taught in a huge hall by a Dr. Trosko. His 8:00 a.m. lectures to us bleary-eyed freshmen were packed. He was charismatic, talked to us as if we were adults (which we were, barely), and took on controversial issues, philosophical questions, moral questions, everything we wanted to question ourselves. He opened our minds and we kept coming back. And I now realize that teaching, for him, was a joy.

Enthusiasm, love, joy, learning. Jesus through His Disciples, and Jesus through Paul, down 20 centuries to us at Holy Apostles. We are thankful for souls who have shared their knowledge freely. We remember with affection those who listened to us. Love creates space for us to find answers, to build something new, whole, and good together.

Just love; now there's a renewable energy.



Alice Avouris lives with her husband around the corner from Church of the Holy Apostles. They retired and moved to Brooklyn when their granddaughter was born. She started attending in January, 2019, after a fun time caroling in December. She loves singing in the choir, playing flute in church, and the Holy Apostles Recorder Consort!