Loretto Earth Network Lenten Reflection: March 6, 2019

Excerpts from “Unfolded and Enfolded by Mercy” Elaine M. Prevallet, SL

*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore, whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. – Luke 12:1-3*

In the passage cited above, Jesus warns about hypocrisy, which seems to involve some disparity between those dimensions of our lives which are readily observed and those that we would like to hide or that we think of as hidden. As a society, we are inclined to hide the things that we are collectively unwilling or unable to deal with. We try to cover up our trash in landfills so that we will not have to confront the embarrassment of our wastefulness. We try to hide our nuclear waste so that we will not have to confront the obscenity of our violence and destructiveness.

Jesus’ words alert us to the fact that there is a relation between what goes on inside us and what is manifest in the external world. The condition of the planet and the society is a manifestation of our hearts and minds. It is all of a piece. What is on the outside reflects the inner reality, and what is on the inside will inevitably manifest itself outwardly.

It is interesting to set the word *simplicity* alongside other words that have the same root. The root *plex* means “fold.” Related words – multiplicity, duplicity, complicity – might suggest images of material spread out with many folds, two folds, folded together. Simplicity means spread out without folds… To be simple is to be free-flowing, unimpeded, not caught in folds or pockets, not sidetracked.

As I read about the “new physics,” I try to imagine myself as a configuration of energy. I have to practice this, though, because it means a real change in my image of myself and the world. I have taken for granted that my reality is separate from that of others.

But the truth of my being is that I am able to be open to what is going on beyond the confines of my skin. I am permeable; there is a flow of energy between me and the world. Some of what I take in will be joy. Some will be pain. But communion and compassion are capacities that bind me to my earth-companions; they are essential to my being human.

The image of our planet from outer space – small and fragile, with its delicately balanced interdependent systems – has challenged us to a new self-consciousness. When those pictures from space first appeared, we had hardly begun to recognize the limitations of our nationalisms and barely felt the urge to transcend the boundaries that divide us. We have only recently begun to think of ourselves as one human family. Now, with what seems breathtaking rapidity, we are newly challenged to push the frame open even wider and to accept our identity as one of the members of the Earth-family of all living beings. The devastated environment gives us a stunning sign that human insensitivity has reached global proportions. Suddenly we can see ourselves in a way we could not before. An opportunity for increased unity with God’s creation is presenting itself. A fold is dissolving. A deeper simplicity is available to us.

We humans (in the West, at any rate) have defined ourselves as “the apex of creation.” Wittingly or not, that self-image has allowed us to assume that we have the right to control and to use anything and everything to suit our slightest whim and fancy. That definition has given free reign to greed, carelessness, and thoughtless rapacity. It has emphasized our separateness from and our superiority over the rest of creation.

“The name the Navajos gave the First [Human] in their creation myth was ‘Anlthtahn-nah-olyah,’ which means created-from everything.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The notion that we were created from nothing, which runs deep in Christian tradition, points up the transcendence of God and the utter contingency of creatures. Like all truth, that is one side of a paradoxical reality. The other side, which our tradition has not emphasized, is that nature has produced us only after millennia of preparation and development. Our horizontal dependence is as essential to our self-definition as is our vertical dependence. Awareness of both forms of dependence engender in us a sense of profound gratitude and reverence – both toward God and toward creation, our P/progenitors. Gratitude and reverence should lead to courtesy. Can we understand ourselves in such a way as to help all creatures feel at home on our planet? What sort of *metanoia* – change of mind and heart – will we need to accomplish so major a change in our self-understanding?

We have said that without our attempts to serve, without our interaction with those around us, we would never see what is within. The reality of the outer world provides us with images of our inner reality: the war, the exploitation, the effects of greed, the addictive lust for control. Ordinarily, we will see some piece of the picture that calls us to change, to right the wrong. That is the voice of Mercy. Species will disappear, polluted land and water will begin to poison us, and we will hear the Voice. Only as we respond will the energy that has been trapped in folds of greed and selfishness begin to open up and flow freely. We will feel compelled to loosen our hold, to share more liberally, to give or to give away. This is the process of being simplified.

It is not a question of great deeds or high heroism. It is only a question of sensitivity to what is right before our eyes – inequities of all kinds, injustices, irreverence, a very basic discourtesy toward one another and toward the whole of creation. It is a question of doing simply and courteously what we do in relation to the reality that presents itself to us. It is a question of letting the folds of arrogant self-images or greed-engendering insecurities dissolve in the Mercy. It is a question of letting the energy flow freely, inside and outside. A question of simplicity.

Questions for reflection:

1. What does the current condition of the planet reveal about our hearts and minds? What implications does this have for our inner lives?
2. Is there energy in your life that is stuck in a fold, deflected from other use, and wasted on internal management? For who/what might you try to free this energy?
3. What folds need to dissolve in your life in order to experience increased communion with all beings?
4. Can we understand ourselves in such a way as to help all creatures feel at home on our planet? What sort of *metanoia* – change of mind and heart – will we need to accomplish so major a change in our self-understanding?

1. Hay, *Undiscovered*, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)