

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Cycle A
Psalm 27; 1Peter 4:13-16; and John 17:1-11a

Recently, I hosted an online panel discussion entitled, "The Pandemic and Those Most Vulnerable." Four people who minister to Philadelphia's poor related how the virus has exacerbated the sufferings of the poor. Hillary Miller, a community health nurse, told how the homeless initially misinterpret her mask as a judgement; she must scramble to explain that she, not them, is the danger. Sr. Eileen Sizer described how the places the homeless normally hang out – shelters, libraries, the "living room" she runs in an unused subway station -- have been closed. "Stay home" means "stay out." Johanna Berrigan of Catholic Worker said the inequities in the health care system have become more obvious. When Fr. Liam Murphy tells someone that people have been asking about them, "they are thrilled to be known; they are relieved not to be forgotten." All four panelists had stories of people who had jobs, homes and families but have lost them all.

As the host, I wanted to reflect back their experiences with connection points to my experiences, but I humbly realized that the ministry of these people was in a different league. Furthermore, these four beautiful people spoke so naturally about their ministry. Of course, helping homeless people find jobs, showers, food and companionship was all in a day's work!

This Sunday, we end the Last Supper discourse in John's gospel. In an intimate prayer, Jesus uses the verb *glorify* five times. He does not mean to praise someone for a job well done, but rather to make visible the invisible work of God. The person or action that glorifies God is a meeting place for God and human beings. God glorifies Jesus, meaning we can meet God directly in the person and works of Jesus. Jesus simultaneously glorifies God, meaning in the Divine, we meet Jesus, who has been "before the world was born." Framed between two statements of this mutual glorification, Jesus says, "Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ." Jesus' prayer is not for mutual admiration's sake; to meet God in Jesus is to be eternally alive.

Jesus does something funky here with time, as he did earlier in this discourse. "This *is* eternal life," present tense, not later, when the suffering is over or after death. Jesus says he "glorified [God] on earth by accomplishing the work you gave me to do." The Kingdom of God became real in the present in the healing, mercy and inclusion of Jesus. The Kingdom broke into daily life.

Okay, but Jesus is gone and suffering is real. Jesus' answer is his fifth use of *glorify*. Referring to his disciples, he says, "I have been glorified in them. And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you." Our works are now the in-breaking of the Kingdom. God is made manifest to the world in these works. People know God through what we do. Eternal life is now.

Do we think of our merciful actions as meeting points between God and humans? Do we mean what we sing in Psalm 27, "I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living"? Where is the good in my pandemic-based problems or in the lives of the homeless? The good was certainly in the panelists who call the homeless their friends. All four panelists easily identified where they saw good: in the care the poor take of each other, in the outpouring of generosity by people of means, in the young staff members "holding this together" and in surprising "saves" by the Holy Spirit.

When asked what people could do to show solidarity and concern, Johanna suggested, "Support the people you already encourage." We each have a contribution to make. As 1Pt 4 proclaims just before our reading, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ." There is that verb *glorify* again! Help people see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living: let them meet God in you!

- ❖ Which of your activities are the work God has given you to do?
- ❖ What did people learn when they interacted with you this week? Did they learn about God?