

Homily September 7 2025 Put me before family Luke 14:25-33 © Teresa Elder Hanlon

Earlier this month we visited my older brother in a care facility in Ponoka. He had had a psychotic break and needed a thirty-day assessment in a place where he could harm no one and no harm would come to him. What came up in our conversation during the visit, for the most part, made very little sense and was upsetting for me to hear, especially as it dove deep into the topic of prayer and God's generosity – but very skewed and non-sensical.

However, afterward, what Vincent commented on was that my brother is a man who cares deeply for others and how good it is now, for him to be receiving good care in his time of need.

For me, Vincent's perspective is putting Jesus first. Let me explain.

His comment illustrates Padraig Ó Tuama's sentiment in the prayer for wholeness today

“To lead with trust instead of fear is to have the faith
that you are God not just with one,
but with all; not just for us but for everyone.
In finding you in the lives of others,
we find more of you within.”

The integrity in Vincent's comment for the wellbeing of others shows the power of the Spirit speaking. We view the circumstance of life with trust, rather than fear, or ridicule, or disgust or despair – all possible reactions when one sees a loved one physically present, but mentally lost.

This approach of meeting difficult circumstances with love and positivity is also reflexive—the affirmation in Vincent's comment for my brother reveals his own compassion and care for others. When we find the holy in the lives of others, the holy within ourselves shows up.

In the book of Wisdom we read that “Mortal reasoning is faulty and our plans are shaky, because a corruptible body weighs down our soul and our frame of clay weighs heavy on a mind already so filled with cares.” This is another way of describing my brother's mental illness.

For millennia, humans have worried, fretted, over thought their circumstances. Often our minds are preoccupied with cares of how to do something or how will we or someone else manage.

The suggestion in this reading is to exit out of the weight and burden of worry and fear by a doorway to prayer and the gospel infers that that prayer can be a focus on Jesus. Where there is a generosity and openness to God's love, there is an invitation to Jesus' presence. “Our mortal reasoning will be faulty and our plans shaky – too much fear and pessimism gets in the way,” says the book of Wisdom . Instead, with the challenges of life, in making decisions, choices, or facing painful life circumstances, and I suggest that these are the tests mentioned in the letter from James, we can look with an openness, a balance of love in our manner and mind, to what might be good in the other, in the circumstance before us. When we turn and open on our own whether in a park or other place of nature, with another person in the spirit of prayer, wisdom surfaces.

We heard in the first reading that “Our best guesses about the things of this earth are only approximate, and we toil to discover even those things which are within our grasp.”

And James tells us that “when our trust is put to the test, our ability to stand firm grows stronger. So we are to keep standing firm until we have passed the test. Then we will have gained all the maturity and strength of character needed to finish walking the good road.” And I suggest that this isn't something we do alone, but where two or more are gathered in the Spirit of Christ, Jesus is there.

James assures us that “If wisdom is needed, ask the Great Spirit, for Creator freely gives wisdom to all who ask and never holds back. ...”

Our gentle efforts, our openness to the unknown, our trust in God’s goodness all bring about trust and maturity in our relationship with the holy one.

If we put Jesus first, as this First Nations Version of the New Testament gospel suggests, does that mean that we hate others as the other versions we’ve grown up with have suggested? Two things to note about the gospel wording where Jesus’ words are to hate mother and father and family – the Aramaic language does not have a superlative case. That is, there is no “love me more or most or less than”. To hate one and love the other is to love more. Second, Reid and Matthews in the Wisdom Commentary for Luke’s gospel say that the word “hate” chosen in most translations isn’t quite accurate. The original word “does not mean to actively despise but is best understood as ‘be disinclined to, disfavour, disregard, in contrast to preferential treatment’. The meaning is akin to the way Matthew puts it “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me” (p. 434).

So how are we to see one another?

I find O Tuama’s words in our final blessing instructive

As we seek to be human together,
May we share the things that do not fade:
Generosity, truth-telling, silence, respect, and love.

The gospel passage suggests that we take a time out to consider circumstances. In the moments of decision, difficulty or challenge, that we take an inventory of lives and look at our priorities, our values our intentions. And I think that Luke has Jesus asking that we detach ourselves, step back from what consumes us in life, including our attachments to things and others in order that we can open to the Spirit.

If we are to zero in on our relationship with the Spirit of Christ as the love from which every other relationship comes, then we can take time to listen for the holy in our conversations. We might spend fifteen minutes at the end of the day listening for the wisdom that was there. What do we need to let go of and what is meaningful in our lives. What was life giving for me today? What was not life-giving for me today? It’s an Ignatian practice.

Also, Dr. Rachel Remen invites the wisdom of our lives to surface with these three reflective questions for the end of the day: What surprised me today? What inspired me today? What touched my heart?

For instance, what touched my heart with the visit to my brother was the kind movement of the nurses’ hand to my brother’s shoulder and the calm, gentle way she told him that he would be staying for a longer time, when he expressed the need to leave that day.

I invite you to share on any of Remen’s questions, or to share on What you noticed in today’s readings and liturgy? Or you might respond to what you’ve had to detach from, What things or relationships had to become ‘less’ for you, in order to focus on or make something someone more in your life?