“Blessed Truth”
Fourth Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul Hursh

For now it is enough to focus on only one verse of today’s Gospel passage. “He began to teach them saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3) This beatitude is truth, pure and simple, but it can only be understood by those born of the Spirit. (John 3:8) Heaven is experienced by those who abide in God, and those who have been born again are those who abide in God.

When a Pharisee named Nicodemus comes Jesus in the night and asks Jesus, “How can this happen?” “How can a person once grown old be born again?” (John 3) Jesus retorts that the kingdom of God is only seen by those who have been born from above, with water and Spirit. There are two catalysts for this rebirth. Two ways that people can be led to the threshold of transformation that we call rebirth; deep prayer and suffering, but most commonly suffering is the catalyst. It is God, of course, that transforms us, but God does not force God-self on us, we must become open to God’s action in our lives.

…But where is God? God is eminent, God is everywhere, but God is also intimate. God resides in us, in the center of who we are – think of a seed in the earth. For this seed to germinate the soil must be fertile and moist. We can water this seed of faith through deep prayer and contemplation. This seed can also be bear fruit when we embrace the suffering in our lives in the same way that Jesus embraced his cross. To embrace suffering means to trust God and allow God to work. God hears our cries and responds with the same peace and healing love that Jesus shared with his disciples on earth. Jesus shared this
peace with those who responded to his call and his invitation to healing and forgiveness. These are the hallmarks of the kingdom of heaven. Either way (suffering and prayer) we can become open in a way that allows God to abide in us.

Later in Matthews Gospel Jesus teaches how his Father answers our prayer for healing and peace.

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.” (Matthew 7: 7-11)

The truth of the first beatitude is that for those who are poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. …that is where they abide now – they abide in God and where God abides, there is peace. In only this first beatitude and the next to last beatitude is heaven a present reality. For all the others there is a promise of future restoration. Heaven is a promise not postponed. Heaven is a promise open to anyone, but especially those who suffer and are poor in spirit. If you struggle with making sense of this, as I do, then we should pray to be reborn through our suffering and through compassion with the poor, to literally suffer with the poor. This can begin when we align ourselves with those who can teach us by their example what it means to be poor in spirit. Those who have been baptized in suffering and in the Spirit. Then the poor in spirit will be a blessing for us as well.