“No Man Is An Island”
Fifteen Sunday In Ordinary Time 2017

Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

“One thing I have learned as a parent is that if you have a daughter who is a mathematician you get books on quantum physics for father’s day presents. The book I am now reading, Reality is Not What it Seems by Carlo Rovelli, is more than a little challenging, but one aspect of Quantum science that has really struck me is that all of reality is relational. The world of existent things is defined by and reduced to the realm of their interactions. Things cannot be defined unto themselves, but only become what they are by how they relate and react to other things. What strikes me about this is that I believe this holds true for everything. Take for instance the words from Isaiah we have heard today.

“… just as from the heavens
the rain and snow come down
And do not return there
till they have watered the earth,
making it fertile and fruitful,
Giving seed to the one who sows
and bread to the one who eats…”
The rain is not rain until it works its effect on the land and the seeds planted there. So too is the word of God. Until it works its effect on us, it is nothing but a void. As it happens it does impact us and works its effect and achieves God's ends for which God sent it. In our own lives, we are defined by our relationships. We are wives or husbands only in relationship to our spouse. We become parents because of the children we bear. We are Christians due to our relationship with Jesus and in the relationship with others as we serve the Kingdom. God creates us in God's image and sends us into the world, what we become depends on how we relate to others. As God's children, we do not return to Him void.

We are created in freedom and are graced with free will and so none of this is forced on us. We can choose to withdraw from the myriad of relationships in our lives, but if we did who would we be then. Wouldn't we cease to exist? Conversely, as we engage in the lives of those around us we have the opportunity to become who God intended us to be. Our instruction is the word of the kingdom spoken of in today’s Gospel parable. How ready are we to receive this life giving word? Are we prepared to engage with others in meaningful relationships that not only build the kingdom of God but also bring meaning and purpose to our own lives?

As we model our lives after Jesus we become the Body of Christ on earth. What this means for the world is best expressed by St. Teresa of Avila when she wrote, “Christ has no body now, but yours, no feet on earth, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks compassion into the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ walks to do good. Yours are the hands which Christ blesses the world.” Let us receive the word of God as fertile soil prepared by our prayer and openness of heart. Let us not overly focus on the concerns of the world and our own advancement, which can become the brambles and thorns that choke the word of God planted in us. Finally, let us not listen to the naysayers and fear mongers of the world that would steal away the word of God before it has a chance to take root in our hearts.

Remember our true identity is based in our relationships and the quality of our interactions with others. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. I can never be what I ought to be until you are who you ought to be.” We cannot make our way in the world or even come into being apart from others, as the poet Jon Donne once wrote…

“No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.”