



Icon of St. Timothy at www.catholic.org

Where have all the leaders gone? That's what I've been asking as I've watched the fiasco that has been playing out in our nation's election campaigns. Where have all the people gone, people who can foster agreement, and lead? It's not a new dilemma. *Lamentations* is a book about what happens to a people when they become leaderless. In Jeremiah's day, the Kingdom of Judah had been invaded and enslaved by the Babylonian Empire. The Prophet blames Judah's downfall on three things: The peoples' sin; (2) their rejection of God's word through the prophets; (3) the absence of Godly leadership.¹

What are the qualities of a leader who can really unite? It's an important question as we head into this election season. For this, we can look at the Epistle from this morning, the Second Letter to Timothy. Who was this young, church-leader Timothy? What are the traits of this young leader described in the Bible? Well, in verse 4 Paul writes, *"Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with Joy."* So Timothy is a man who inspires joy in others, yet is not afraid to cry. Tell me, when was the last time you saw an elected official cry? I suppose crying doesn't fit into the modern, American myth of the rugged, independent alpha-male. Seeing a man cry is, evidently, off-message; not part of the strategy of marketing a modern political candidate. When did we lose sight of the fact that our leaders need to be human, and fully in touch with emotions like pain and pity? How did we get to this point?

In the next few verses, Paul writes about this about Timothy: *"I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle this gift of God that is within you through the laying on of hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but a spirit of power, and love, and self-discipline"* (2Tim.1:5-7).

In our country today, you will doubtless hear numerous people talk about their "faith." But so often, it's not really faith they are talking about. It's pride. Because you see, faith is believing – faith is truly trusting in something other than yourself. Or put collectively, faith is believing in something other than "ourselves." I heard a very disturbing description of a church congregation recently. A fellow clergyman was talking about his experience in a large church in a city in the Southeastern United States, and he told me sadly, "You know, that church is where people go on Sunday morning to worship themselves." Pride and self-confidence are not the same as faith. To have sincere faith such as exhibited by Timothy is to believe, to absolutely trust in something other than, stronger than, better than yourself.

And did you notice how Paul encourages Timothy to rekindle this faith? Did you note how Paul reminds this young church leader that *"God did not give us a spirit of cowardice"* (1Tim.5:7a). Some translations say that God did not give us a spirit of "fear," or "timidity." So, it is clear that at some point, Timothy must have confessed to Paul his fears and his doubts. Can you remember a time recently when a political leader actually said, "I'm not really sure I know the answer to that one"? The truth is that if you have a true, sincere faith, if you have a trust in something other than yourself, there are going to be times when doubt insists on bubbling to the top of your spirit. And of course, for the Christian these moments of doubt are invariably answered by God in His time and in His way. God uses our moments of doubt to actually prove His absolute love for us, and through these times of challenge our faith ends up being tempered and strengthened. If a man or a woman is to lead in truth, then these moments of doubt are unavoidable, and indeed, strangely enough these moments of doubt are actually signs of a true leader.

¹ See Introduction to *Lamentations*, *The English Standard Version Study Bible* (Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2008)
Copyright © 2016 by James Barnhill. All rights reserved.

In verse 8, Paul encourages Timothy to join with him “*in suffering for the Gospel.*” So, if a man or a woman is truly a leader, he is not afraid to suffer. Not only is he not afraid to suffer, but – and here’s the kicker – he is also not afraid to ask others to join him in suffering. But everywhere you turn, on both sides of the political spectrum you hear messages like, on the one hand, “We’ve turned the corner, things are going to be fine!” Or from the other side you might hear, “Just vote for my party and we’ll put things back on the real road to moral goodness and prosperity!” When will we finally hear a politician whose campaign message is, “We’ve got some dark days ahead, and we’ve got some painful steps to take if we want to right this ship”? When are we going to have a leader who actually invites everyone to take up his Cross, and suffer with him? Oh yeah, but there was that one man who asked this of us, wasn’t there? And of course, He did the lion’s share of the suffering for us, didn’t He?

Paul concludes this morning’s Epistle by writing, “*Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.*” (2Tim.1:13-14) So, here Paul encourages Timothy as a leader to discipline himself through a constant reliance on God in his life through the presence of the Holy Spirit. This means an intimate association with God. Some would say this means, “Knowing God as your personal savior.” I would like to suggest that our reading of the Scripture, and our daily prayer time is so intense that we come to a beautiful place of “Knowing God as my all-loving, heavenly Father; *Abba*; Daddy.”

This ever-challenged yet ever-strengthening faith in an all-loving Father is the quintessential character-trait of the true Christian leader, and it is this faith that ties all this morning’s readings together. Now, we have described this faith as (1) a character trait that is familiar both with joy and with pain. (2) We have said this faith, true faith is strengthened by moments of doubt. (3) We know this faith is not the same as pride, for faith is our absolute trust in something other than ourselves. (4) We know this true faith goes hand-in-hand with suffering. (5) And we know that the faith of the true Christian leader is nurtured by a daily discipline of prayer and study, producing a wonderfully intimate relationship with the Father.

Finally, how are we to search out the man or woman who has been marked by God for leadership in His Kingdom? And how should we model ourselves, if we have determined to lead others to the Cross? Well, this model is found in this morning’s Gospel passage from Luke. And it is the model of servant-hood.

Did you notice how in Jesus’ description of the faithful servant from Luke 17, there is really no reward of praise or extra blessing meted out to this man when he has finished his chores. The successful completion of his tasks is simply part of living in the master’s household. Oh, to be sure, there are other blessings that such faithful duty imparts which are not included in the story. Yet, there is really no incentive scheme employed here to add further productivity to the labor pool, is there? We get no feeling that this fellow is going to receive a hefty end-of-the-year bonus for excelling at his job.

No, for this laborer, the completion of the tasks assigned to him by his Lord, and the continued citizenry in the Lord’s household are really reward enough. In a very real sense, this worker’s servant-hood is his own reward. Just the fact that the Master is smiling down upon this faithful servant at the end of busy day in the Kingdom, well that is more than reward enough.

So let me ask you this morning, are you satisfied with a servant’s reward? Are you satisfied with the Lord’s smile? I have to tell you that there are moments of incredible blessing in this life of the faithful servant, moments when I am looking adoringly up to God. And I know, I **know** with an absolute certainty that God is smiling back, content with my service for His Kingdom. This is, in the end, the servant’s reward. And I promise you, to feel the Lord smiling down upon you; that is more than enough reward. It is sweeter than the honeycomb, and more priceless than much fine gold, this servant-hood in the household of God. (see Ps.19:10) It is the great joy of a life lived in faith. It is that loving mercy of God which is truly new every morning. (See Lam.3:23)

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen. JWB+, 09-26-13

(Rev. James Barnhill is an Episcopal Priest. You can contact him and read his work at www.1thes511.net)

Copyright © 2016 by James Barnhill. All rights reserved.