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Columns
Spirituality



A statue of St. Veronica, carved by Francesco Mochi in the 17th century, can be seen in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 8. According to tradition, she was moved by compassion for Christ and wiped his face with a veil during the Way of the Cross. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



by Carol J. Dempsey

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March 29, 2025

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Four topics emerge from this Sunday's readings: celebration, reconciliation, God and compassion. The first, celebration, emerges from the reading taken from the book of Joshua that features the Israelites celebrating the eight-day Jewish holiday of Passover. This celebration is one of Judaism's most sacred events. It commemorates the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt and the sparing of the Israelites' firstborn child when the "angel of death" passes over the Israelite community en route to striking dead all the firstborn among the Egyptians.

Agriculturally, Passover represents the beginning of Israel's harvest season, a time when the people enjoyed the plentiful produce of the land. But for parts of Israel today, the season of Passover does not usher in a lush harvest season. For years, a severe, historic drought and a water crisis have gripped Israel, affecting irrigation capabilities that, in turn, impact agriculture and ecosystems. Even though some efforts have helped to ease the water crisis, the land continues to suffer under ecological oppression caused by environmental factors, namely, climate change. And yet, in the midst of ecological adversity, the celebration of Passover continues in anticipation of an end to all forms of oppression plaguing the world today.

The second topic, reconciliation, is the main theme of the reading from 2 Corinthians. Here we are reminded that the Divine One remains reconciled to us, and in turn, we have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. But what does reconciliation mean, and why is it important?

In his book The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace, Jack Kornfield offers wisdom from the Buddhist tradition. He states: "In Buddhist monasteries when conflict arises, the monks and nuns are encouraged to undertake a formal practice of reconciliation. They begin with this simple intention: 'No matter what the hurt within us, we can seek to be reconciled. Even if we cannot or should not speak to the other, we can find the courage to hold reconciliation and goodwill in our own heart. We can do our part toward the healing of the world.' " Reconciliation aims to repair and restore relationships.

Without a doubt, our world is in need of healing of interpersonal relationships, whether these relationships be among family members, co-workers, friends and even heads of state and leaders of nations. Sanctions, tariffs, cold war tactics, peace treaties and ceasefires are merely temporary solutions to conflicts, disagreements and inequities. With wisdom gained and intelligence developed, with gifts and talents in play alongside good fortune of wealth, power and negotiating skills, human beings have yet to learn how to live and work with each other in a spirit of fecundity, respect, trust, mutual accountability and integrity.

But today's reading goes one step further. It is not enough to be a messenger of reconciliation. We are encouraged to be reconciled to God.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 30, 2025
Joshua 5:9a, 10-12
Psalm 34
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The third topic emerging from the reading from 2 Corinthians is "God." Perhaps before we can be reconciled to God, we need to ask: Who is this God, this Divine One? Is it the God of the empire whom we meet in the prophetic texts, this God who curses and harms people when they are not "obedient"? Is it the God of Gomer who metes out the harshest of chastisements because she has been cast as an "unfaithful" spouse, a whore? Or maybe this God is a gendered male deity who sits on a throne, a king, casting judgments and ruling over all. Perhaps this God is the "Lord," a title derived from ancient biblical agrarian societies that had landlords and serfs.

New Testament scholar Sandra Schneiders of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan, argues that the question for the 21st century is the "God question" — who or what is God? (See her essay "God Is the Question and God is the Answer" in *Spiritual Questions for the Twenty-First Century*.) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, also a New Testament scholar, pushes Schneiders' ideas further. She argues that we need to interrogate how the scriptural rhetoric of empire has defined our understanding of the Divine (see "The Rhetoric of Empire

and G*d Talk: Decolonizing the Divine" in *The Power of the Word: Scripture and the Rhetoric of Empire*). How we understand the Divine impacts how we live out our lives, how we interact with others and how we make political, social, economic and ecological decisions.

The parable in today's Gospel offers us an insight into who the Divine One is, even though we can never fully comprehend. The Divine One is Compassion, the fourth point that emerges from today's readings. This Sacred One reconciles, heals broken relationships, welcomes and cherishes all creation. Being reconciled to the God of compassion is bound to have a transformative effect on the one who is reconciled who, in turn, will be not only a messenger of reconciliation but also the embodiment of it.

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