

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is about the spiritual life as the life of the beloved. I am often in the presence of people openly accused of inadequacies in the role of being parents, so I have known many people hear voices that tell them that they are no good, that they are a problem, that they are a burden, that they are a failure. They hear a voice that keeps saying, "If you want to be loved, you had better prove that you are worth loving. You must show it." But, instead, I move toward the spiritual life. A life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice that says something else, that says, "You are the beloved and with you I am well pleased."

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Jesus heard that voice...coming out of the Jordan River. I could hear that voice, too. The one saying, "You are my beloved son; you are my beloved daughter. I love you with an everlasting love. I have molded you together in the depths of the earth. I have knitted you in your mother's womb. I have written your name in the palm of my hand. I hold you safe in the shade of my embrace. You belong to Me and I belong to you. You are safe where I am. Do not be afraid. Trust that you are the beloved. That is who you truly are."

It is not very loud, because it is intimate. Comes from a very deep place. Soft and gentle. We must hear that voice and claim for ourselves that this voice speaks the truth, our truth. Telling us who we are....so we can start the spiritual life. Claiming the voice that calls us the beloved.

To live the life of the beloved, we can focus on four words that come from the gospels...words used in the story of the overabundance of bread, words that are used at the Last Supper, words used at Emmaus, and words used constantly when the community of faith comes together. Those words are: He took, He blessed, He broke, and He gave. To be taken, to be blessed, to be broken and to be given is the summary of the life of Jesus who was taken into the wilderness, who was blessed by God, was broken on the cross, and was given to the world. And so it is also the summary of our life because just as Jesus, we are the beloved.

First, we are taken. Perhaps a better word would be chosen. We are chosen by God, which means we are seen by God in our preciousness, in our individuality. Seen as precious in God's eyes. In our world, we tend to divide, saying in effect, "It is good for me, and too bad for you." But, in God's mystery, being chosen does not mean excluding anyone. In fact, the more we know we are seen in our preciousness, the more we will realize that all people are seen in their preciousness.

I encounter people who often have a very hard time believing they are chosen, suffering from the

feeling of being not wanted, not desired. Losing touch with the truth that they are chosen, precisely because often the people around them have said, "I don't want you around. I don't want you to be here. Why don't you go away?" But, the life of the beloved starts by trusting that we are chosen in our uniqueness, that we are unique in God's eyes.

The second aspect of the life of the beloved is that we are blessed. You and I must experience that we are blessed. The word benediction means blessing. Literally, bene means "good" and diction means "saying". To bless someone means to say good things about them. We need to know good things are being said of us and we really have to trust that, or otherwise we cannot bless other people.

On Ash Wednesday, among other places I often go to the Oneida County courthouse in Utica. Years ago, I saw an old friend who has had a troubled life, especially since the passing of her dear husband. She received ashes, but asked for more time..."Jim, can you bless me?" The imposition of ashes, a little cross on her forehead using ashes, opens us into the way of the remembrance of a far deeper connection with God, but she needed more...she missed her husband so, her daughter still struggled, as now did her grandson...saying, in effect, "I want to be blessed."

As she sat, I came to her side, put my arm around her shoulder, pulled her close to an embrace, and told her how she is always loved by God, that she is held up by God all the time, not only when those who care for her tell her so...saying, "Blessed are you, Angie. You know how much we love you. You know how important you are. You know what a good woman you are." And I could see the energy returning to her, the smile returning to her face, relieved from the feeling of depression because suddenly she realized again that she was blessed.

I am ever mindful that we are broken people. We know that we are broken. Much of our brokenness has to do with relationships. If you ask me what it is that makes us suffer, it is always because someone could not hold onto us or someone hurt us. Each of us can point to a brokenness in our relationships with our spouse, with our parents, with our children, with our friends, with our lovers. Wherever there is love, there can also be pain. Wherever there are people who really care for us, there is also the pain of sometimes not being cared for enough.

What do we do with our brokenness? As the beloved of God we have to dare to embrace it, to befriend our own brokenness. We should NOT just say, "That should not be in my life. Let's just get away from it. Let's get back on track." No. We should dare to embrace our brokenness, to really look at it. "Yes, I am hurting. Yes, I am wounded. Yes, it is painful." I do not have to be afraid. I can look at my pain because in a very mysterious way our wounds are often a window on the reality of our lives. If

we dare to embrace them, then we can put them under the blessing. That is the great challenge.

Quite often, we want to solve people's problems and tell them to do this or to do that, that we will help them out and let's move forward. Treating it all as a function only causes us to differentiate, to assign fault, to designate blame....living our brokenness under a curse of maintaining it as our own to treat, to fix, to own, to bear..and that can snowball a lot. It is like an affirmation that you are no good and suddenly you say, "You see what has happened? I lost my job. This friend didn't speak to me. He rejected me." We can hold on to it and, BINGO! See, there is the proof of our own self-fulfilling prophesy that I/we are just no good, or not good enough.

But the great call is to put our brokenness under the blessing, to live it as people of whom good things are being said. If we live our life as people who are taken, blessed and broken, then we can give ourselves. We are taken, blessed and broken to be given. It may sound a little strange, but I really believe deeply that our greatest human desire is to give ourselves. We usually think in terms of wanting to have a lot for ourselves so then we will give a little bit. No, I think the greatest fulfillment of our heart is in the giving, to give ourselves. It is letting go. The great mystery is that as we let go for others our lives start bearing fruit.

Jesus says, "It is good for you that I die because when I die I can give you my spirit and you will bear much fruit in your life." That is the final call, to give ourselves. When we are people who are chosen by God -- blessed, broken -- we can give ourselves to others.

There was a little boy and everybody said that he was not worth much of anything, but he had five loaves and five fishes. Jesus received him, and took the five loaves and five fishes. He broke the bread after having blessed it, and he gave it, and in giving it multiplied and it was enough for everyone to eat. That story says something about our lives...which is "you are the beloved, and with you I am well pleased."

Says the loving and eternal God to each and every one of us, all in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.