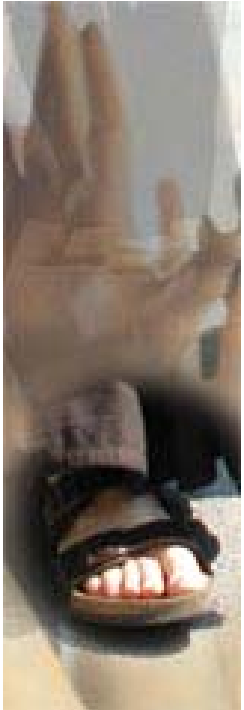


JPIC Reflections

This brochure is one of a series on various themes in justice, peace and the integrity of Creation. You may read them on our website: www.sbfranciscans.org.



You are invited to download them as well from this website and to use them as a way to quickly bring a Franciscan perspective to your discussion group, prayer group or social justice dialogue.

We only ask that you would credit the authors of these brochures as you use this material.

“These are touchstones of Franciscan spirituality for me, touchstones that help me to interpret my experience and, through understanding more deeply the transformative potency available each day, to practice radical openness to God’s creative love enlivening heart and actions. The persons and events described in these reflections are real, and represent only a small part of the tangible grace my work at St. Anthony Foundation brings to me.”

Gail Priestly

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

When we least expect it, the violence within ourselves will rear its ugly face. When and what situation has this happened to you?

ACTION:

What can you do to remind yourself to channel the energy of this violence?

PRAYER:

***Loving God, of peace and justice,
be with us as we work and pray towards
changing the hearts of all who use violence
as a way of showing our love and concern
for our siblings, Water, Air, Plants and Animals,
in the created world.***

Justice, Peace & the Integrity of Creation

TOUCHSTONES IN THE TENDERLOIN:

*“I’m blind;
I need my stick!”*

by Gail Priestley

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TOUCHSTONES IN THE TENDERLOIN by Gail Priestly

The old woman flailed about randomly and mercilessly with a broken off car antenna. She wanted to eat in the Dining Room, but she would not give up her stick. “I’m blind I need my stick!” she shouted; a small, bent over, black woman between two large, very calm young men, Jerome and Rodney, Client Safety Service staff, who patiently explained and cajoled and finally prevailed. They would keep her stick safe. She could eat lunch.

I witnessed this, feeling relieved as she was seated at a table. She looked like she needed a meal; rail thin, frail. Before the meal could be brought to her, she was surrounded by ripples of disturbance. Everyone got up from her table, some cursing. She had tried to strike someone. “She’s a problem,” said Jerome, “I don’t know if she’s gonna get to eat today.”

“I’ll eat with her,” I said. Jerome looked doubtful. I sat next to the woman, happy when a volunteer brought her a meal. She guzzled her milk, the whole cup at once. A meal came for me: hot pocket, rice, zucchini, peach slices, donut. We ate side by side.

“Leave my food alone!” she muttered occasionally, slapping the table in front of her for emphasis. “How am I gonna take this hot pocket home,” she said more to herself than to me.

“Here,” I offered, “I have an extra napkin.” WALLOP! She hit me hard, a blow not just with her arm but with her whole body.

“Leave my food alone!” screamed. My eyes filled with tears from the shock and pain of being hit, from the realization that she thought I was going to take her food, from the shock of feeling behind her violence the violence that had been done to her over and over again, people taking her food.

I looked at her, not knowing what to do, uncertain about what might happen next. She turned and looked at me. “Oooooooh,” she crooned, “Oh, oh, oh! You’re one of my babies! Yes, you are just one of my babies.”

To view the world from the position of the poor is a journey from a place of power and privilege, “let me help you”, to a place rent by shocking, unimagined consequences; a place of uncertainty, a place of tears, a place where violence is unmasked, a place of holy reversal. In the end, I was the one in need. I needed forgiveness for my insensitivity, for my lack of imagination into the terrors of this woman’s life. A hundred-fold was the forgiveness I received.

She shared her vision of me, seeing me not as a helper but as a child, her baby.

How could she call me her child?

What did she see? My tears? My hurt?

My uncertainty?

I do not know.

In the midst of violence, the violence of my insensitivity, the violence of victimization, the violence of lashing anger; she sang a song of love, “Yes, you are just one of my babies.” She dared me to stand with her, vulnerable and precious, claimed by a love that could prevail against violence.

To view the world from the position of the poor is not an intellectual or imaginative exercise. It cannot be forced. It happens through engaging in a relationship where all are ultimately equal. This cannot happen without the in-breaking recognition of one’s own poverty, limitation, need. While this may be desired, it cannot be willed. It may come in the form of a shocking revelation. It requires stepping towards another with openness and trust, entering into a reality that will be disturbing, disillusioning; helping one to see the many layers of security and secret superiority “helpers” and “non-poor” carry in spite of our best intentions.

It is a moment of grace where mercy forges a deeper participation in the mystery: we are all God’s children, united in love, journeying together through violence and terrors and oppression towards greater and deeper manifestations of God’s transforming love.