

So today, as we journey into Holy Week, I would like to begin our travels with Nicodemus as our guide. Nicodemus shows up in the Gospel of John three times. You are going to hear all three readings with a reflection after each and some questions that you may wish to ponder as you journey through these days.

Reading 1: John 3:1-16

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

I have always been attracted to Nicodemus. As I sat with this reading, I think I started to get a better understanding of why. Nicodemus is drawn to Jesus – there is something inside him pulling him toward Jesus; he is intrigued, curious; he has seen and heard some things that are really appealing to him and knows that Jesus has to be

connected to God somehow or he wouldn't be able to do such things. So this desire in Nicodemus to know more from Jesus leads him to find Jesus at night.

Night – I'd like to say two things about night. One of my favorite quotes is from a book called, Mr. God This is Anna, and the quote is this, "Night, it stretches you." "Night, it stretches you." I love night time. It is the time when things start to quiet and soften. And the stars piercing the night sky or the moonlight shining on the foot of my bed – those are the times when my soul stretches out to God, the times when I can ask myself the deeper questions, the times when I can be more vulnerable in a conversation with a trusted friend, the times when I can hear God whispering to my heart, the times when I can wrestle with the challenges in my life, in all honesty, the times when I can argue with God. Whether it is peaceful or turbulent, night, for me is a time of clarity. So I get Nicodemus going to Jesus at night in an attempt to understand that which he feels in his soul but can put no words to – in an attempt to wrestle with his own inner questions.

Now the other thing about Nicodemus and night is that I am sure he just did not want anyone to see him with Jesus. He did not want to make his life any more difficult than it already was. Again, I can relate. When I was starting to more actively discern religious life. I didn't want anyone to know – now I'm sure all the sisters had their eyes on me, but I didn't want to feel pressured in any way as I was exploring this path for my life. I had been speaking with one particular sister, my spiritual director, and my closest friend, but that was it! So this sister lets me know that the Vocation Director was going to be in the area. Did I want to see her? "Nope" I said, "I am this close, but not yet." Well the next morning...it was yet. I called this sister back and said I had changed my mind, but I didn't want any of the other sisters to know. So she called the vocation director and set up a time for me to meet her....at the end of a dirt road in the country! Nicodemus and I are kindred spirits!

What helps you when you are wrestling with something?

Have there been times when you have felt a need to remain hidden?

Reading 2: John 7:37-52

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified. When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet." Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?" So there was a division in the crowd because of him. Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?" The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!" Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you? Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the law – they are accursed." Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?" The replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."

So our friend Nicodemus continues to be curious. He is following Jesus case, so to speak. He knows what he has been up to and what he is doing. And his curiosity and desire has turned to a real thirst. When Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink." Nicodemus heard that and understood. He was able to put words to that feeling in the pit of his stomach. He was thirsty – thirsty for hope, for justice, for peace, for knowledge that he was God's beloved, and that God needed to be a part of his life in a way that hadn't happened up until now. This thirst was so strong, it gave Nicodemus the courage to speak up, to question his colleagues knowing that there was some risk involved by doing so.

Many moons ago, I worked in a domestic violence shelter. Although it was under the auspices of Catholic Charities, when I was speaking with one of the residents or

someone on the hotline, I could not bring up God or faith unless they brought it up first. I found this frustrating at times. I didn't know how to convey hope and possibility in sometimes dire situations if I couldn't tap into a foundation of faith in that other person. What becomes the anchor to hold onto? How does one see through the storm to the rainbow on the other side? I certainly did my job, and I believe I did it well enough, but it created some clarity for me in my own life. Whether I was happy with what was happening in the church or not, whether I thought my priest was a good preacher or not, whether I was angry with God or not, I had a relationship. And that relationship grounded me. My prayer, my community of faith filled friends, the sisters who mentored me along the way rooted me in my faith and encouraged me to grow into the person that I am today...and I hope never stops. My faith has given me the courage to use my voice at times and ask a question as Nicodemus did, even when I wasn't sure what the consequences of asking would be.

For what do you thirst?

How has your faith given you courage to use your voice?

Reading 3: John 19:31-42

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced." After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a

hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

So here we find Nicodemus at the end of Jesus' passion. He has followed Jesus' actions in Jerusalem and all that had been done to him. He interacts with Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple of Jesus...which leads one to believe that Nicodemus is a disciple too. And Nicodemus is referred to as the one who first came to Jesus at night – but if they are burying him before the sabbath, this is happening in the day (late afternoon if we understand the story correctly) Nicodemus has come out in the light in order to act on the behalf of Jesus. Which means our friend Nicodemus, nourished by the living water, is coming into his own – he is learning what it means to be a disciple of Jesus regardless. It is not just about belief in Jesus, but putting the values of our faith into action.

Now in this reading, Nicodemus offers me both a great reminder and a very real challenge. The reminder actually comes by putting the three readings together – to see the process, to see his growth. Nicodemus moves from night to day, from silence to speaking, to acting. When I look back, I too can see my growth- from despairingly saying “I will never be a morning person” when challenged by 6:30 am community prayer, to now cherishing my personal prayer time...at 6:30 am. From thinking I did not know anything about theology, therefore who am I to open my mouth – to understanding that this is my experience of God, and I'm happy to share it with you so you might recognize God in your own life. From feeling like I did not know how to pray, to understanding that I have *so many* ways to communicate with this one I love and who delights in me! I have grown in my life of faith and my relationship with my Divine Creator. And I hope never to stop growing!

And yet, here too is where Nicodemus challenges me. Sometimes it is easier for me to put my faith into action than at other times. I may go out of my way to sit with a friend who has a relative in the hospital even though I don't really have the time, yet am very

quick to get the needy person who wants to talk off the phone. I might help out at a soup kitchen when it is convenient, but leave it to others when it is not. I may act in accordance with the gospel values when it is safe to do so, but may be more likely to fade into the woodwork or simply walk away when it does not appear that those values will be approved of. Nicodemus calls me to stretch and grow just a little bit more.

Where have you noticed your own growth in your faith life?

In what ways have you put your faith into action?

In what situations have you struggled to do so?

Maybe one of the readings sparked your curiosity and you want to spend more time with it. Maybe you want to journal with one or two of the questions. My hope is that as we have walked with Nicodemus, you too may take on his curiosity during this Holy Week. Listen closely, allow yourself to wonder and ponder, journal with the readings, color an image that comes to your thoughts, allow yourself to be captured by one of the other characters in the scripture readings these days and see what God has to say to you through them.

Peace!