

Numbers 11:25-29
Ps 19: 1-4, 8, 10, 14 R: *May our words be pleasing to you, O God.*
Hebrews 7:11-16
Mk 9:38-41

Ecstasy and Laundry

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There's a painting of artist Corita Kent that I especially love. It reads, "After the ecstasy, the laundry." I love it because, like many human beings, I long for and seek out the experience of ecstasy, especially in relationship to God. But I also love it because there is so much goodness in doing laundry.

In 2006, after my ordination on Lake Constance, our family traveled by car from Switzerland to Spain, where – among other things - we visited friends in Cordoba. In Europe, washing machines are small; and often there are no driers, even in upscale homes. In Cordoba, when it was time to wash our clothes, we took the wet clothes to the roof to dry. We hung them on lines where they baked in the powerful Andalusia sun. When we came home, I asked Phil to help me string up a clothesline so I could use southern California sun to save electricity. After some negotiating, Phil helped me hang a clothesline. Now I spend wonderful, contemplative moments hanging clothes to bake in the powerful southern CA sun. They come down feeling rough, but smelling good, sun dried liked raisins – or craisens. Just 5-10 minutes in the drier leaves them soft and smelling of natural lavender from Trader Joe's. It's often a contemplative experience for me. My neighbors, however, let their bushes grow 3 feet taller so they wouldn't have to look at my laundry!! They're very Catholic so I was prepared, if they challenged me, to tell them about the IHM workshop that taught me driers use more electricity than almost any other appliance and that kids whose families live near electric plants have much higher rates of cancer than children who don't.

Footnote: Laundry is, historically, associated with women. But I suspect that doing laundry is like yard work, historically associated with men: tending a yard, cutting the grass in perfect rows, edging it neatly, watering it gently, then standing back and taking in its civilized beauty.

Of course, Corita was talking about something different than either laundry or yard work when she created her art. She was talking about the contrast between ecstasy and the necessary, menial, tasks and encounters that *aren't* uplifting. She uses laundry, a staple of convent life, as a metaphor. She was saying, perhaps, that we can't live in ecstasy. We have to come back to the basics: food, clothing, shelter, work that makes those possible, and to other people – for better or worse. We might attempt to infuse menial tasks, and challenges with other people, with the Spirit as we've experienced it in moments of ecstasy; but most of life is menial. Most of life is "laundry".

That's what Moses and Jesus were dealing with: after the ecstasy, the laundry. Moses came down from the mountain after a profound, life-changing encounter with God to face the tattler and Joshua who want Eldad and Medad disciplined. The tattler and Joshua have an institutional mentality. Eldad and Medad didn't come to the mountain with Moses and the rest of the elders, so they should be silenced. Chapter 9 of Mark's gospel began with Jesus and three friends on the mountain where they had an ecstatic experience. The rest of chapter 9 is about the laundry. Jesus came down the mountain to face disciples arguing with scribes, disciples who can't help those in need; disciples arguing among themselves about which of them is the most important, and tattlers who want Jesus to stop the anonymous person who successfully cast out demons in Jesus' name because that person was not one of them.

Both Moses and Jesus seem to take a similar approach to this ancient, recurring conflict between religious experience and religion organized around the personal experience of a great leader. Their concern is *whether* the laundry is getting done. If so, that's enough. It's doing the laundry that counts. Criticizing others for how they do the laundry is not what discipleship is about.

You may have read the internet story about the couple who moved into a new house. During breakfast, looking out her window, the woman saw her neighbor hanging laundry out to dry. She commented to her husband that her neighbor's laundry wasn't very clean. She thought the neighbor needed better laundry soap. Her husband remained quiet. Every time the neighbor hung her laundry out, the woman would make the same comments. Some time later, the woman was surprised to see nice, clean wash on the neighbor's line. She said to her husband, "Look! She finally learned to wash correctly." This time, her husband spoke. "Oh, yeah", he said, "I washed our windows". The anonymous author concludes: "So it is with life...what we see when watching others, depends on the window through which we look."

So here we are, taking a moment for possible ecstasy before we get back to the laundry of life, seeking the sunshine and lavender in it!