

## Day 249 – Tuesday, November 24, 2020

By now you know I am a fan of Fr. Ron Rolheiser. Here is one of his columns.

### ***An Invitation to Maturity – Weeping Over Jerusalem***

***By Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI***

Maturity has various levels. Basic maturity is defined as having essentially outgrown the instinctual selfishness with which we were born so that our motivation and actions are now shaped by the needs of others and not just by our own needs. That's the basic minimum, the low bar for maturity. After that there are degrees and levels, contingent upon how much our motivation and actions are altruistic rather than selfish.

In the Gospels, Jesus invites us to ever deeper degrees of maturity, though sometimes we can miss the invitation because it presents itself subtly and not as explicitly worded moral invitation. One such subtle, but very deep, invitation to a higher degree of maturity is given in the incident where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. What's inside this image?

Here's the image and its setting. Jesus has just been rejected, both in his person and in his message and he sees clearly the pain the people will bring upon themselves by that rejection. What's his reaction? Does he react in the way most of us would: *Well, the hell with you! I hope you suffer the full consequences of your own stupidity!* No. He weeps, like a loving parent dealing with a wayward child; he wishes with every fiber in his being that he could save them from the consequences of their own bad choices. He feels their wound rather than gleefully contemplating their suffering.

There's a double challenge here. First, there's a personal one: are we gleeful when people who reject our advice suffer for their wrong-headedness or do we weep inside us for the pain they have brought onto themselves? When we see the consequences in people's lives of their own bad choices, be it with irresponsibility, with laziness, with drugs, with sex, with abortion, with ideology, with anti-religious attitudes, or with bad will, are we gleeful when those choices begin to snake-bite them (*Well, you got what you deserved!*) or do we weep for them, for their misfortune?

Admittedly, it's hard not to be gleeful when someone who rejects what we stand for is then snake-bitten by his own stubborn choice. It's the natural way the heart works and so empathy can demand a very high degree of maturity. For example, during this Covid-19 pandemic, medical experts (almost without exception) have been telling us to wear masks to protect others and ourselves. What's our spontaneous reaction when someone defies that warning, thinks he is smarter than the doctors, doesn't wear a mask, and then contracts the virus? Do we secretly bask in the cathartic satisfaction that he got what he deserved or do we, metaphorically, "weep over Jerusalem"?

Beyond the challenge to each of us to move towards a higher level of maturity, this image also contains an important pastoral challenge for the church. How do we, as a church, see a secularized world that has rejected many of our beliefs and values? When we see the consequences the world is paying for this, are we gleeful or sympathetic? Do we see the

secularized world with all the problems it is bringing onto itself by its rejection of some Gospel values as an adversary (someone from whom we need to protect ourselves) or as our own suffering child? If you're a parent or grandparent who's suffering over a wayward child or grandchild you probably understand what it means to "weep over Jerusalem."

Moreover, the struggle to "weep over" our secularized world (or over anyone who rejects what we stand for) is compounded by yet another dynamic which militates against sympathy. There's a perverse emotional and psychological propensity inside us which works this way. Whenever we are hurting badly, we need to blame someone, need to be angry at someone, and need to lash out at someone. And you know who we always pick for that? Someone we feel safe enough to hurt because we know that he or she is mature enough not to hit back!

There's a lot of lashing out at the Church today. Granted, there are a lot of legitimate reasons for this. Given the church's shortcomings, part of that hostility is justified; but some of that hostility often goes beyond what's justified. Along with the legitimate anger there's sometimes a lot of free-floating, gratuitous anger. What's our reaction to that unjustified anger and unfair accusation? Do we react in kind? "*You are way out of line here, go take that anger elsewhere!*" Or, like Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, can we meet unfair anger and accusation with tears of empathy and a prayer that a world that's angry with us will be spared the pain of its own bad choices?

Soren Kierkegaard famously wrote: *Jesus wants followers, not admirers!* Wise words. In Jesus' reaction to his own rejection, his weeping over Jerusalem, we see the epitome of human maturity. To this we are called, personally and as an ecclesial community. We also see there that a big heart feels the pain of others, even of those others who reject you.

"Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in one hand, champagne in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming "WOO HOO what a ride!" (Hunter S. Thompson)

Sincerely,  
Fr. Jim Kaptein