

Reflection for 8-2-26

The first two readings today, from Isaiah and Paul's letter to the Christian community in Rome, had me thinking about a quote often attributed to Dorothy Day. Dorothy was reported to have said that at the heart of the Christian gospel is the call "to comfort the afflicted, and to afflict the comfortable." It seems like as good a summation of Jesus and his ministry as anything else I have ever heard.

I've identified and tried to live out that quote during my entire adult life, whether in offering solace and succor to those who are discarded or marginalized in our society or by taking aim at the powerful—religious, economic and political elites—whose comfort comes at the expense of those they impoverish or belittle, all the while, seemingly escaping justice. I think of other figures who have articulated this same admonition: Dietrich Bonhoeffer who stated that the dual roles of people of faith during times of national crisis were to tend to those wounded and bleeding and to "drive a spoke in the wheel" of the apparatus that rolled over them. Or Pope Francis, calling on the church to operate as a "field hospital" for those suffering while prophetically denouncing those whose policies and lifestyles inflicted that suffering.

I've done my share of comforting and afflicting. But—whether because of age or encroaching vulnerability or the times being what they are—the part of that phrase that I am most identifying with lately is "the afflicted." I imagine that in many ways—big and small—others find themselves here with me too.

It is through the ears of the afflicted who long for comfort that I hear the passage from Isaiah:

*"All you who are thirsty, come to the water.
You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat;
Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!"*

And in Romans:

"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In my darkest moments, my loneliest times, my most fragile days, this is what I lean on. This is where I find my comfort. I hope you, and all those who carry the weight, find it too.

~Johnny Zokovitch