

## **Addicted:**

### **Eucharistic Practice and Learning to Live as Prisoners of Hope**

**“Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope”**

- Zechariah 9: 12

Every night when it's about time to go to bed  
I engage in the same little game of self-sabotage  
I'm embarrassed to admit  
It looks a lot like a scene out of the Secret Life of Pets...  
You know that moment when we're introduced to Chloe the cat?  
As soon as her human companion is gone  
She swats away the dish of boring cat food, and opens to fridge  
Only to find a jaw-dropping, drool-worthy roast chicken  
She jumps up to get at it  
but in a fleeting moment of self-control, hesitates –  
she knows she's about to do something wrong –  
shaking her head in shame, and sinking down  
But she can't stay away...she has to have the chicken!  
She opens the fridge again, glimpsing the juicy chicken  
And freaks out as she tries, in vain, to restrain herself  
Next scene: Chloe spitting out a chicken bone  
Her eyes glazed over in a food-coma-induced-stupor  
And we all roar with laughter as she rolls off  
The fridge shelf, flopping to the floor, only to discover an irresistible cake.

We love Chloe because she is us. A clever parody of us.  
We become cartoonish, too, when we behave this way.  
Sub out a paw for a hand, and it's pretty much the same story for me:  
11pm comes around and...  
A bowl of cereal, a bag of caramel popcorn, and an ice-cream sandwich later  
And all those calories burned at gym are for naught.  
You'll be happy to learn that your priest goes to weekly confession,  
And it looks something like this:  
“Jude, why hasn't your body fat index declined at all in the past 3 months?”  
My only defense: “I love sweets, and they love me right back.”

We all struggle with doing good, and not doing bad;  
But we all sometimes fail, too.  
Chloe is Paul, too, or Paul, Chloe...whichever you prefer.  
In a rare moment of vulnerability,  
Paul steps outside his paternalistic comfort zone with the churches in his charge,  
Putting himself on the proverbial couch for their benefit and ours.  
He openly admits to the Church in Rome  
That sometimes he misses the mark despite his best efforts.  
In fact, he notices it's precisely when he's trying the hardest to do good  
That he becomes most susceptible to sin's power within him.  
It's a strange paradox:  
"I do not understand my own actions.  
For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."  
Those are strong words coming from a man who elsewhere  
Describes himself as "a slave to Jesus Christ," and "in chains for the gospel."  
Even Paul finds himself a prisoner of less holy forces.  
The subtext of this passage is clear, and clearly encouraging:  
Take heart, beloved. Even super apostles don't always get it right.

We know the good, we may even will the good,  
But so often we choose the alternative,  
We fill ourselves with empty half-pleasures,  
And we do this through no one else's influence but our own.  
Thankfully, God's grace is not depleted by our deficiency.  
I chose a fairly silly example, but there are many more serious ones  
If we but scan our hearts and take an honest inventory of our lives:  
Refusing to be reconciled to a loved one  
Because we are too convicted of our self-righteousness;  
Returning over and over to destructive behaviors we know will not end well.  
And this occurs along a spectrum, doesn't it?  
From the trivial to the highly consequential -  
Bad habits on one end, and addiction on the other -  
And from the personal to the social.

We talk about being addicted to fossil fuels in our society today,  
I'm coming to believe we're addicted to division, too -  
That high we get from generated needless conflict.

We often think of addiction relating to things like illicit substances or sex,  
But it may just as easily come in the form of food, anger, control, etc.  
We have an endless capacity to fixate on things  
That become impossible to detach from without a feeling of violent separation.  
We all need God's help overcoming these things,  
And the good news is that God is more than willing to help us.  
We just have to turn our hearts toward Wisdom.

As you consider what that looks like in your own life,  
Consider also Jesus' words in today's gospel.  
Like Paul, he names a powerful reality at work in us:  
We are our own obstacle to the progress we desire.  
To put it in the vernacular: we can be our own worst enemy.  
Paraphrasing today's gospel:  
We are like children who can't play with each other  
Because we don't know how to receive what's already on offer.  
Instead of receiving the gift freely, Jesus charges,  
You're always putting on airs, wearing unhelpful masks.  
And, Jesus says, *it's exhausting.*  
"Come to me all who are weary."  
What wearies you tonight/this morning?  
What do you need to lay down today?  
Where do you need to take on Christ's yoke of gentleness and humility?

Yoke is an interesting word,  
One that's no longer familiar to us in the post-industrial age.  
It's a piece of wood attached over two animals  
So their combined energy can be harnessed to plow a field.  
Darren often reminds us at yoga on Tuesdays  
That the word "yoga" in Sanskrit simply means "yoke."  
We need spiritual practices to yoke ourselves to the very salvation we seek.  
Yoga may be one of your practices, and at this table we engage in another:  
The Eucharist, or Holy Communion.

Jesus commanded that we remember Him every time we gathered  
Not because He requires our validation in any way,  
But just the opposite -

Because he knew that we need holy habits to break unholy ones.  
Here at this table we learn to yoke ourselves to God's will for us  
By surrendering our affections to that Love that remakes the world.

At this table, we learn that God already wills what's good for us.  
God's life and power pulsing through the cosmos, and through our veins, wills it.  
In Jesus, God comes very near to us, close enough to touch and heal us.  
Close enough also to challenge us, to confront our own lowered expectations.  
Time and again, Jesus demands that we not see ourselves as defeated.  
"Very Truly I tell you: these things you shall do, and greater things still!"

Crucially, we learn by Jesus' relationship to his disciples  
That God is immensely patient with our own slowness of heart and ineptitude  
As we stumble toward who God calls us to be.  
And this divine compassion is very heart of our salvation.  
"His compassion is over all His works."  
If someone in your life has ever mentored you through a significant challenge  
You know what I'm talking about.  
More often than not, the key to our success in those moments is humility.  
Admitting that we don't have all the answers  
And opening ourselves to the possibility others may have something to teach us.

It's not a coincidence that recovering addicts have such a strong,  
instinctive grasp of God's saving grace.  
When I say salvation, I don't mean from the hellfire hereafter.  
I mean from the Gehennas that burn in our own hearts,  
Threatening to consume everything around us.  
How might your understanding of Communion change  
If every time you approached this table you imagined yourself to be an addict?  
So much of our lives may be characterized as learning, *or not*,  
How to get out of our own way,  
Learning how to say yes to our own thriving.

Here, at this table, God invites us to be prisoners of hope.  
I love that phrase.  
Take it in. Receive it. Claim it tonight/this morning.  
Would that our lives were captive to hope instead of other things.

It begs the question of us:  
Will we live in the grip of fear, or the grip of grace?  
One will choke the life out of us,  
The other will empower us to squeeze the sweet nectar out of life.  
One is like vinegar, the other like wine.

Darren usually pauses during yoga on Tuesdays to remind us:  
“Notice,” he says, “that the world outside is the same  
As the one that was there before you came in;  
But something feels different, something has changed.  
Yoga isn’t about forcing everything around us to conform to our expectations  
But letting go of that need, and in doing so, discovering true freedom.”

So a fun spiritual direction game to play with yourself is this:  
Is your inner life more like a tax collector or a prostitute?  
Is it like a masquerade - mysterious even to you –  
whose faceless dancers are nevertheless also your own invited guests.  
Perhaps it's charged with a sense of intrigue but also danger.  
Or is your inner life more like an overly managed wedding reception –  
meticulously choreographed down to the last detail –  
guests not only known but strategically placed  
so as not to upset the delicate social balance  
that arises out of bringing in the new and the old, the familiar and the extended.

We come to the altar today of a God  
Who prefers the company of prostitutes and tax collectors  
To priests in their pious finery,  
Who dances in our masquerade  
in order to invite us to the table of Love's true feast.  
Who, by an act of unimaginable humility,  
is content to remain veiled to the naked eye under the guise of bread and wine  
That we, opening our hands in naked need of His saving grace  
May see Wisdom lifting us out of our exhausted striving after passing things  
And Into the eternal light of Her joyful presence.  
Praise be that She always has the final Word.  
Feast on that this tonight/morning.

