

Reflection for Feb. 19, 2021

Sharon Holland, IHM

Why do we ask questions?

- To get needed information
- To show interest
- To satisfy curiosity
- To prompt further thought

Once, before I was of school age, my mother asked me “How high is ‘up’? What prompted that question? It certainly wasn’t information she needed ... or that I had. She had been an elementary teacher and I suspect she just wanted to see what I would come up with. I think I answered that “up” is any distance above the ground.

Our readings today hold a number of questions. In the Gospel, we have the disciples of John trying to understand the ways of Jesus and to know if they should be following Jesus or John. Perhaps it was the wrong question, but they were sincerely seeking. They ask: “Why do we and the Pharisees fast much, but your disciples do not fast?”

As frequently happens, Jesus’ response is not entirely clear and it comes in the form of another question. “Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?” He assures them that those guests will fast later when the bridegroom is gone.

There is at least a hint that the question is not the right question ... or perhaps it is not asked for the right reason. Centuries earlier, in the writings of the prophet Isaiah in our first reading, we have a similar dialogue.

The people cry out to God: “Why do we fast, and you do not see it? Afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?” They seem to expect a reward for their fasting. Is the act of fasting misguided—or are their motivations off balance? The response of God is swift, pointing out what is lacking. God says, “Lo on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits and drive all your laborers. Yes, your fast ends in quarreling and fighting. ... Is this the manner of fasting I wish? ...

“This rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thong of the yoke ... sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and homeless. ...”

Today, might God say something similar to us? Might we hear, What I desire is this: that

- In the midst of this Coronavirus health crisis, you will be patient with the restrictions and compassionate toward the sick;
- In this Black History Month, you will join in expanded efforts to bridge the racial divides in ourselves and in our country;

- In these days of hostile political agitation, you will be open to hear and respond in the spirit of Gospel values;
- In our world, fragile with hatreds, hunger, poverty and violence, your prayer will be for the whole world, and you will make generous efforts to understand that, as Pope Francis insists, we are all brothers and sisters.

In this time in our lives, each of us may hear some similar call.

Then, as God says to Isaiah, we too will hear the promise: “your light will break forth like the dawn; ... you shall cry for help, and God will say: ‘Here I am!’”