Personal Bible Journey: Praying Through Stories

M5 Presentation Session
Monday, May 23, 2011, 2:00pm to 3:15pm
NACC National Conference, Milwaukee, WI

Gregory of Nazianus (329-389)

- Lord, as I read the psalms let me hear you singing.
  As I read your words, let me hear you speaking.
  As I reflect on each page, let me see your image.
  And as I seek to put your precepts into practice, let my heart be filled with joy.

Personal Bible Journey: Praying Through Stories

- It is a method of transformative personal theological reflection
- Using biblical stories to encourage the reminiscence of similar events, characters, and places
- The development of the group narrative story.
Skills of a small group journey

- **Skill of Listening**
  - Hearing with the heart and with the head
- **Skill of Reflection**
  - A method of active listening
- **Skill of Reminiscence**
  - Personal experiential involvement
- **Skill of Prayer**
  - Spiritual conversation
- **Skill of Storytelling**
  - Sharing

William Clements,
*Fourth Quarter of Life*

- 75 to 100+ years old
- Emotional and spiritual disconnect
- Living on borrowed time
- A time of ongoing loss
  - Dismemberment
  - Disconnection
  - Displacement

Erik H. Erikson,
*Identity and the Life Cycle*

- Changing life situation
- False sense of protective isolation
- Withdrawal from social interaction
- Diminishment of the will to thrive
- Possible need for a higher level of care.
I believe …

- The Fourth Quarter of Life is the most powerful, sacred and useful time of life
- It needs to be acted upon
- It needs to be lived to the full
- It needs to be engaged

Dylan Thomas

- Do not go gentle into that good night,
  Old age should burn
  and rage at close of day;
  Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Areas of Hope

Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us
- A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the US

- Recommends:
  - Guided formation to find fullness in the emerging solitude of their lives
  - The elderly need “to tell their story”
Areas of Hope

- **David O. Moberg,**
  *The Christian Religion and Personal Adjustment in Old Age*
  - Religious activities and the practice of faith enhance self-image
  - The practice of social, religious tenets of hope, forgiveness, altruism, love
  - provide the ability to stabilize personal imaging and improve social relationships

- **Mary Alice Wolf,**
  *Selfhood and the Older Learner*
  - Educational programs spark:
    - The curiosity to learn
    - The desire to develop
    - The imagination to create
  - Continuing education leads to the “fulfillment of the self … self actualization”

- **Linda Woolf,**
  *The Life Review Process in Later Adulthood*
  - Reminiscence is:
    - A “normal developmental task”
    - A tool used to re-vision the self
      - Restructure life stories
      - Adapt to life’s triumphs and disappointments
Areas of Hope

- Reminiscence is:
  - A “conscious or unconscious” process
  - A psychological reorganization process
  - A renewed personal identity
  - Identity is reorganized
- The important part is **redefining identity**
  - With real or imagined memories

Congregation for the Clergy,
*General Directory for Catechesis*

- The integration of “actual life experience”
  - Inspiration
    - Sacred scripture
    - The teaching of tradition.
- Faith and life experiences provide
  - A practical understanding of the Gospel
  - An illumination of the fullness of life

John Shea, *An Experience of Spirit: Spirituality and Storytelling*

- “The stories of our experience”
  - Possess the substance of spirit and of memory
  - Stands in as the proxy of absent tangible divine presence
- Active listening to the community’s sacred stories
  - Merges the personal narratives into the sacred tradition
  - Affirms and justifies the defining experiences
John Shea, *An Experience of Spirit: Spirituality and Storytelling*

- **The sharing of the sacred stories:**
  - **Community:** confirming the gathering not that of strangers but as a community of faith
  - **Every day experiences are scrutinized**
    - Through the lens of religious and historical tradition
    - The religious tradition takes the experience to a transcendent level.
  - **Construction of a reasonable world**
    - “To see properly the dynamics of every area of life … providing a prelude to action.”

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**“Faith comes from hearing – *fides ex auditu.*”**

- Messages of a divine nature are thought to be revelatory
- The stirrings of the human heart are due to the perceived absence of the divine
- The divine seeks to be heard
- The community of understanding seeks with the expectation of increased understanding

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**The story is recorded**

- “Map the interaction”
  - Lived experience
  - The divine inspiration

- **This story process is**
  - Not within a historical point
  - In an existential reality
  - Always in transition
Don S. Browning,
*The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*

- The act of pastoral care is a process of a moral inquiry
  - Which does not to moralize
  - Draw outs from the group or person
    - The initiative and value
    - The frame work of future action and understanding

Don S. Browning,
*The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*

- The role of pastoral care is to provide a structure
  - That enables discovery
  - Defining structures or values
  - Development of a determinative understanding of the presenting moral dilemmas
  - Resulting in an applied practical theology

Personal Bible Journey: Praying Through Stories

- A method of 5 steps
- Each step involves 3 activities
  - Listening
  - Reflecting
  - Sharing
Step one:

*Listen with the ears of the soul*

- Bernard Longergan - **Be Attentive**
  - Listen as if for the first time
  - Attended to the meaning of metaphoric words
  - Listen to identify personal meaning.
  - Seek to increase the awareness of self
  - Attend to the data of sense and consciousness

Step Two:

*Hear from experience and reason*

- Bernard Longergan - **Be Intelligent**
  - Listen with your feelings
  - Turn your ear to yourself
  - Engage the mind, body and spirit
  - Be attentive to how you naturally dress the scene
  - Hear with new feeling

Step two:

*Hear from experience and reason*

- **Use the five senses to:**
  - Be attentive with your whole body
  - Identify and Create your image of metaphor
  - Compare the implied divine and spiritual truths with sensible things
Step two:
Hear from experience and reason

- *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*
  - Ask and listen, to accompany the integration of actual life experience with Sacred Scripture and religious tradition.
  - Faith and life experiences join to provide practical understanding of the Gospel which illuminates the fullness of life.

Step three:
See with the eyes of the heart

- Bernard Longergan - *Be Responsible*
  - How am I drawn?
  - Nonjudgmental listening to the events of life

- Respond to the story
  - Deliberation, evaluation, discussion, action, what we can know and do, not just what pleases but what truly is good and worthwhile

- What is beyond myself?

Step four:
Identify the insight

- Bernard Longergan - *Be Reasonable*
  - Reflection and Judgment reaching an absolute
  - Acknowledge what really is so independent of us and our thinking

- Prayer as conversation
  - bilateral talk and listen
  - invite reflection and experience to merge
  - USCCB - The application of memories of the life’s celebrations
Step five: Sharing our discoveries

- The Importance of Story
  - Sam Keen - “the keystone of personal identity.”
- Action exists at the alpha and omega point
  - Identify your association with the story
    - The discovery point
    - The departure point
- Develop the group narrative

The Personal Bible Journey: Praying Through Stories exercise:

- Welcome and greeting
  - Up to six participants
- Prayer
  - Prepare for active listening
- Reflection
  - Follow the five steps
- Sharing
  - Be attentive to the common threads

Step one: Listen with the ears of the soul

- Bernard Longergan - Be Attentive
  - Listen with the ears of the soul
- Step one question:
  - What is on the surface going on?
- Activity
  - A - Recite the biblical story out loud
  - B - Pause in silence to ponder:
  - C - Please discuss what you have heard
Step two:
**Hear from experience and reason**

- Bernard Longergan – **Be Intelligent**
  - Listen with your feelings

- **Step two question:**
  - What is going on under the surface?

- **Activity**
  - A - Recite the biblical story out loud
  - B - Pause in silence to ponder:
  - C - Please discuss what you have heard

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Step three:
**See with the eyes of the heart**

- Bernard Longergan - **Be Reasonable**
  - Listen without presupposition

- **Step three question:**
  - Am I able to identify the larger picture?

- **Activity**
  - A - Recite the biblical story out loud
  - B - Pause in silence to ponder:
  - C - Please discuss what you have heard

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Step four:
**Identify the Insight**

- Bernard Longergan - **Be Responsible**
  - Reflection and Judgment to reach an absolute

- **Step four question:**
  - What is my head and heart doing?

- **Activity**
  - A - Recite the biblical story out loud
  - B - Pause in silence to ponder:
  - C - Please discuss what you have heard
Step five:  
**Sharing our discoveries**

- **Pull the parts together**
  - Enable the memory associations

- **Step five question:**
  - How am I associated in the context of this story?

- **Activity**
  - A - Recite the biblical story out loud
  - B - Pause in silence to ponder:
  - C - Please discuss what you have heard

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**Genesis 3: God walks in the cool of the afternoon with Adam and Eve**

The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

When they heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. The LORD God then called, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself."

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**Genesis 18: Abraham and Sarah offer Hospitality to the Messengers of God**

Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent, as the day grew hot. Looking up, he saw three men standing nearby. He ran to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he welcomed them.

Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring you a little food, that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way."

"Very well," they replied, "do as you have said." Abraham hastened into the tent and told Sarah, "Quick, make rolls." He picked out a tender, choice steer, and a servant quickly prepared it. When all had been prepared, and set before them; and he waited on them under the tree.
**Genesis 18: Abraham and Sarah offer Hospitality to the Messengers of God**

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked. "There in the tent," he replied. One of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah will then have a son." Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent, just behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, and Sarah had stopped having her womanly periods. So Sarah laughed to herself and said, "Now that I am so withered and my husband is so old, am I still to have sexual pleasure?"

But the LORD said to Abraham: "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I really bear a child, old as I am?' Is anything too marvelous for the LORD to do?"

**Song of Songs 3: God’s Love Searching for Us**

On my bed at night I sought him whom my heart loves-
I sought him but I did not find him.

I will rise then and go about the city; In the streets and crossings I will seek Him whom my heart loves.
I sought him but I did not find him.

The watchmen came upon me as they made their rounds of the city:
Have you seen him whom my heart loves?
I had hardly left them when I found him whom my heart loves.
I took hold of him and would not let him go till I should bring him to the home of my mother, to the room of my parent.

**Luke 24 - The Encounter on the Road to Emmaus**

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing debating about all the things that had occurred. Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.

Jesus asked, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" The one named Cleopas, replied, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" Jesus asked, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place."
John 11 - Mary Meets Jesus
Outside of Bethany

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he
heard that he was ill, he remained for two days in the place
where he was.

Then after this he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."
He said this, and then told them, "Our friend Lazarus is
asleep, but I am going to awaken him."
Martha went to meet him; but Mary sat at home.
Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother
would not have died. (But) even now I know that whatever
you ask of God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your
brother will rise."


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Timothy John Doody, D. Min., BCC
tdoody@reshealthcare.org
Spiritual Services
Casa San Carlo Retirement Community
Resurrection Health Care

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