

Complete Rest

Reflection by Felix Carrion

Read Leviticus 25:1-19

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound laborers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely.

Reflection

These lines from Leviticus 25 should be required reading for all Christians. Here is a sampling of why.

In this passage, the Israelites are stretching to learn that there is a way to live that makes for community, for just and good living, for the care of each member of the community. They are struggling to learn that the value of the land cannot be monetary. Who owns the land? Who owns the earth, if not God, the Creator? Yes, it is ours too if we respect it, if we do not violate its laws.

"Inter-being," to use the words of Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, means we live because of all existence. Without earth, without each other, without God, we would not be here! In Inter-being or Interdependence, we discover the true value of our relationships. They are not the stuff of commodities but of community. It is in this interdependence that we find our Sabbath, our complete rest. It is a holy rest that restores humanity's well-being, sanity, and wisdom.

If this be true, then unlike contradictory parts of Leviticus, there can be no allowance for any kind of slavery. The Jubilee year is meant to be true and transcendent for all people. If back then the Israelites took the Jubilee concept part of the way, today we take it all the way.

Prayer

Dear God, please teach us again the true meaning of Sabbath. Amen.