

Word Working – Going Solo

By Sister Janice Grochowsky, CSJ

(Editor's Note: Below Sister Janice shares an experience of a way in which the Word Working process may be incorporated into a person's individual prayer life.)

In the latter part of January as the Lenten Season was approaching, I began to ponder what additional practices I wanted to undertake that would, hopefully and with God's grace, result in a deepening of my relationship with God. As I listened to Bishop Gilmore's words of introduction at the ITV Word Working training session, my spirit was touched at Bishop's invitation to "let the Word become your mirror." From that moment on my mind was made up...the Lenten practice I would incorporate into my daily prayer time would be an adaptation of the Word Working process.

Throughout the Lenten season, I took the gospel reading of the day's liturgy and followed the process of reading the passage a total of three times. Instead of sharing with others after each reading, I wrote out my responses—incorporating a method of journaling into the prayer experience. The three questions corresponding with each reading of the passage remained the same throughout Lent: 1) What word, phrase or image caught my attention? 2) How is this passage speaking to me? 3) What am I called to do or change? Lastly, I wrote my prayer of "thank you" and "please."

I found this method of being more attentive to the Lenten gospel readings to be very enlightening and a source of growth and healing. The second question particularly helped me to place that Word of God side-by-side with my lived experience and ponder what message God might be wanting me to hear. I also noticed how some "themes" surfaced two or three times within a short amount of time...one of God's ways of helping me to pay attention. Perhaps an example will help me convey in a very small way the grace that the Word of God can be in one's life and how the Word might be a mirror.

Early in the Lenten season a hurt from the past had come into my memory. This hurt occurred over five years ago, and I thought I had worked through it sufficiently. However, something triggered this memory and the hurt I had experienced years ago. It was also indicating I was still carrying the pain of this hurt within me. It became clear to me that I had not worked through this incident and the feelings it had elicited as I thought I had.

As I read the gospel passage for the Saturday of the First week Lent, it was as if my responses to the first, second and third question hit me at once. The passage from Matthew was, "...leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled and then come and offer your gift." This one line spoke directly to the memory and feelings I had been struggling with. At the end of the Word Working portion of my prayer, I asked for God's grace to allow me to extend forgiveness to the other person, to pray for reconciliation between us. And this prayer was very powerful. Afterward, I truly felt as if reconciliation had occurred. I felt that some measure of healing had taken place within me. God was very good to me that morning—

not only in providing the Word, but also with the grace of reconciliation and healing.

But there is more!

Within the next week, there were two other gospel passages that spoke to me of extending love and forgiveness when it is difficult: "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." and "...stop judging and you will not be judged... forgive and you will be forgiven..." God's Word was alive and active that particular week, and affirming in a very real way the manner in which I was handling an issue that I needed to deal with.

All of it is God's doing...God's grace. I need only to be open and willing to allow God to speak and work.

I reflect back to Bishop Gilmore's words of invitation: "Let the Word become your mirror this Lent and you will discover things about yourself that you've never before known, never before seen. Let the Word be your mirror this Lent and you will be open to its invitation to change, open to its invitation to conversion." Wow! This was very much my experience as illustrated above.

The Word can be our mirror on any day and in any season. Whether using the Word Working process for communal prayer or as a tool for personal prayer, God's Word has the power to touch lives and effect change.

My experience of using the Word Working process and journaling has been very enriching for my spiritual life. I recommend it to anyone who would like to try it. If writing isn't helpful for someone, then I suggest reading the passage three times and mentally answering the three questions. The Word of God is a wonderful gift that can nourish us in so many ways. Savor it!