

Reflection for the first week of Advent

ANNA

'We who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high.'



I would like to look at an intriguing biblical woman who draws our attention as we reflect on the spiritual power of women. She appears in the early part of Luke's narrative. Her name is Anna, of the tribe of Asher. Lk. 2:36-38. From this little we know that Anna was 'well got'. Her husband died after seven years of marriage, and the gospel tells us that she is now of great age, eighty four. She spends her time in the temple worshipping with prayer and fasting night and day. The reference to Anna takes up a very small space in the Gospel narrative, but in spite of her near invisibility there are three important things it tells us.

First, she is a widow and therefore belongs to a group of women mentioned a number of times in the N.T. The widow is, like the stranger, the orphan, and the poor, a special object of God's concern.

As a widow Anna serves as a prototype for what later became an order of consecrated widows and for the place of widows in general in the church's earliest periods. The Christian community was asked not only to respond to the needs of widows, but to encourage their contributions as well. It is clear that a large and active office for older women existed in the church,

A second thing to note about Anna is that she is the first evangelist. At the end of the gospels, women proclaim the resurrection. Here, at the beginning, we find an older woman proclaiming Jesus' advent. When she sees the child with his mother, Anna heralds Jesus 'to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. (Lk. 2:38)

Thirdly, Luke presents Anna to us as a prophetess. She stands in the tradition of Miriam and Deborah and foreshadows the other women who receive this calling (Acts 21:9) As a prophetess, Anna is a woman divinely inspired to make known God's word to others. She is able to see and interpret for her people the hidden revelation of God, the meaning of the events of their time and the call to turn to the ways of God. Anna witnesses to the coming of the day of the Lord: "I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy" (Joel 2:28; Acts 2) The story of Anna can serve to underscore the spiritual potential of older women. Poised at the end of one era and the beginning of another, she is rooted in the ways of God and able to point her people to a future of trust and promise.

READING: Luke 2:36-38

Meditation with Anna

Anna you are an intriguing and nearly invisible figure.... Easily overlooked amid the cast of characters welcoming Jesus, so slim is the passage that names you... Just two verses in Luke's Gospel.... Yet your name will never be forgotten.... There is something quietly luminous about your aged presence... You move out of the shadows to offer wisdom for our lives...

You knew how to wait long, long years.... how to let time unfold its mysteries.... The rivers of your life flowed back to you in solitude because you were ready and attentive.... You came by at just the right moment.... And your heart opened in praise... Did you know decades of longing, of emptiness, of doubt?.... What demons did you battle during your days of prayer and fasting?.... Teach me to wait in times of darkness ready to greet the dawn....

You show me how to move gracefully into the season of my ripeness, how to ready myself for winter.... I ask for your courage to wait.... your discernment to know the right time....your clarity

to see Jesus in every human face.... and your spirit of evangelization so that I, like you, may bring joy to a troubled world.

You learned to gaze into the human face of a little child and find the face of the eternal God. Let me reach for that depth of vision.... Sometimes seeing is easy.... Redemption is there laughing back at me as I see a beautiful child run to his mother or swing in a park or pick a poppy or lick an ice cream....

.... Hope touches me like an earnest young girl who shares her dreams for shaping the world....

There are other times when a veil conceals the Holy in all around me.... Violence and lack of love shout out at me as I hear someone respond sharply to another or brush aside a kind gesture.... I scan a room or crowd and find faces so unlike my image of the divine that I struggle to believe.... Let me learn to look on all faces with the eyes of faith and hope.... May the epiphanies of the divine show me how to release the fire in my aging so that I offer Your love to the world.

PRAYER

God of wisdom, God of all women,
widows and wives, maidens and mothers,
look with favour now, today
on the greying of our gender.
May all who feel insecure and anxious be set free.
As we grow old in age
may we also grow in wisdom and grace
and the gracious art of learning to let go.
May we speak your Word with love forever and ever. Amen.

Sr. Anne Hannon