

Jesus and the Disinherited by Howard Thurman
Reflections shared by Sister Bernadette Weber, OSB

Thurman attended Moorhead College in Atlanta with Martin Luther King. He seems to have the same spirit as King which is the spirit of Jesus. Jesus, himself was among the disinherited. Thurman summarizes the essential message of Jesus for the disinherited in these words, “You must abandon your fear of each other and fear only God. You must not indulge in any deception and dishonesty even to save your lives. Love your enemies.” He notes that hatred is destructive to the hated and the hater. So, the demons we must overcome are fear, hypocrisy and hate. We can do this by being more disciplined in love, integrity and hope. We must live in the present with dignity and creativity. This is how Jesus lived. He was a poor Jew, a member of the minority group. His message focused on the urgency of a radical change in our inner attitude. Our inner attitude needs to be one of respect for ourselves and respect for every person. No one can really take the inner freedom from anyone. We must acknowledge that all are created equal. All depends on how we relate to one another. Violence instills fear and tries to take away a person’s self-respect and personal dignity. Knowing who one is, “I am a child of God, created in God’s image” tends to stabilize the ego and results in new courage, fearlessness and power. Thurman notes, “To deny one’s own integrity of personality in the presence of the human challenge is worse than death.” Regarding the demon of deception Gandhi says, “Speak the truth, without fear and without exception. ...You are in God’s work, so you need not fear man’s scorn. If they listen to your request you will be satisfied. If they reject them, then you must make their rejection your strength.” Thurman writes of the power of Psalm 139 – the all-knowing and ever presence of God with us. Regarding hatred: Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit and death to communion with his Father. The first step toward love is a common sharing of a sense of mutual worth and value.

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