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Core questions

- How do we move from the world as it is, to a more just and generous one?
- What is the role of the parish in generating a more just and generous common life?
- How is the parish an incubator of a democratic politics of the common good?

2

Listening as a sacred act

- In Scripture and in parish life change begins with a cry

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Listening as the basis of the faithful witness

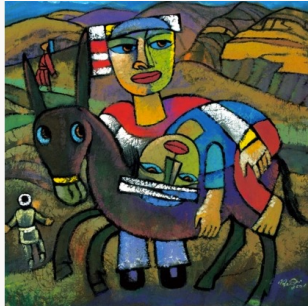
‘The law says: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God.” It said not: “Speak,” but “Hear.” ... Be silent therefore first of all, and hearken, that thou fail not in thy tongue.’

(Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy*)

- Listening as constitutive of the parish/congregation
- It must be listening to Scripture and hearing the cries of our neighbors together.
- Listening bears witness to and embodies a world created and reconciled in Christ amid a fractured and atomized culture.

4

From hearing cries to faithful action



'The Good Samaritan' (2001) by He Qi

- **Grief as a prelude to action is felt in the body first:** we feel it in the gut. Bad rule eviscerates the ability to feel it in the gut.
- **Love, anger and grief**

5

From hearing cries to faithful action

Righteous anger: "Tent of the Presence" (1981)

"It is not temper, not the hot words exchanged when the driver ahead cuts you up. Nor does anger imply violence, as we have been taught to assume. No, anger comes from the old Norse word 'Angr', which means grief. Grief implies that there is a vision—a vision of a good life that was or that could have been. Anger and grief are rooted in our most passionate memories and dreams—a father whose spirit has been tried by demeaning work or no work, a brother or sister lost to violence or alcohol or drugs, a church vandalised by an arsonist, a college career sabotaged by an under-funded and increasingly poor education system, a neighbourhood of shops and families and affections and relationships ripped apart because banks won't lend to it, because insurance companies wouldn't insure it, because government wouldn't service it, because youth wouldn't respect it, or because teachers wouldn't teach in it. Anger sits precariously between two dangerous extremes. One extreme is hatred, the breeding ground of violence. The other extreme is passivity and apathy, the breeding ground of despair and living death."

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What is lament?

- **Lament neither melancholy nor despair:**
structured grief orientated to hope for a better configuration of the world as it is.
- **Lament evokes reality**
- **Lament as orientation to God**

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The symbiosis of lament and praise

Praise and lament as two sides of the same coin

- Before Christ's return we can neither praise without lament (triumphalism) nor lament without praise (pessimism and despair).
- The Christian liturgical year the cycle of feasting and fasting embodies through time the need to hold lament and praise together.

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The Spirituals as Lament

Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
 Nobody knows but Jesus
 Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
 Glory hallelujah!
 Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down
 Oh, yes, Lord
 Sometimes I'm almost to the ground
 Oh, yes, Lord
 Although you see me going 'long so
 Oh, yes, Lord
 I have my trials here below
 Oh, yes, Lord
 If you get there before I do
 Oh, yes, Lord
 Tell all-a my friends I'm coming to Heaven!
 Oh, yes, Lord

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Listening and repentance

- The challenge of hearing cries is the challenge of being called to repentance and re-learning obedience to God.

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The enemies of public lament and shared grief

The politics of respectability

- Liberalism's emphasis on rational consensus orientation and constructions of the line between "public" and "private";
- The emphasis among "professionals" on being an impartial expert;
- Bourgeois notions of respectability;
- Dominant church cultures of being polite and deferent to those in authority.

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The enemies of public lament and shared grief

The politics of denunciation:

- **Scapegoat:** Find an enemy
- **Demonize:** Define an issue as good vs bad in a Manichean, either/or way
- **Dumb down the script:** lose all complexity and ambiguity from the issue so appears to be a choice between good and evil.
- **Develop a sense of victimhood** in the one talked to that diminishes any sense of them having agency to change the situation for themselves.
- **Be the messiah:** Present your solution as the only possible saviour to problem who will rescue the victim and make the world come out alright.

12

The enemies of public lament and shared grief

The politics of escape:

- Retreat into sectarian ghettos, gated communities, or escapist fantasies, whether religious or cultural.
- They are individualistic heavens that divorce us and insulate us from the cares and concerns of those around us. They atomize and segregate us rather than bring us together with others. They are private worlds that de-skill and de-motivate us from being able to participate in a common life.

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A Common Life Democratic Politics

- Where can we learn to listen and hear? Where do we encounter others not like us? Where can we learn to live in solidarity with the people in our parish?
- Through hospitality to strangers and building a common life through democratic means

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A Common Life Democratic Politics

- A common life, democratic politics requires actively listening and talking to and forming relationship with those not like us and with whom we disagree, or even find scandalous
- Having to build relationship and listen to others is a vital way in which Christians learn the humility and penitence necessary to hear God and neighbour.
- Through building a common life born out of listening means taking seriously who is before one and attending to the situation and their needs rather than trying to predetermine what to do in accord with some prior agenda, ideology or strategy of control

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A Common Life Democratic Politics

A common life approach means moving beyond a service provision model where we:

- Determine what others need before listening to them,
- Put program before people,
- Remain in control, and those being served have no agency or say in what happens or what is done
- Act in a top down, unilateral way and power is concentrated in the hands of the service provider.

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A Common Life Democratic Politics

A common life, democratic approach:

- Listens first and responds to what is needed,
- Puts people before program,
- Seeks to develop reciprocal relations (not one way, service orientated relations) in which we know our neighbors stories and something of their lives; and
- Where those we relate to have power and agency to contribute to what is done and the service that is provided
- Community organizing as one model (e.g., Manhattan Together).

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Parish Life as Democratic Practice

- Moving from being a mere population with its basic needs met to becoming a people pursuing a common good
- Small 'd' democratic social practices and culture vs. democracy as a system of statecraft
- Forging a democratic common life is a work of true beauty
- "The glory of God is a human being fully alive." Irenaeus of Lyons
- Parish as incubator of a democratic common life and a witness to the common life we share in Christ.

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The parish: a community of faith amidst a community of fate

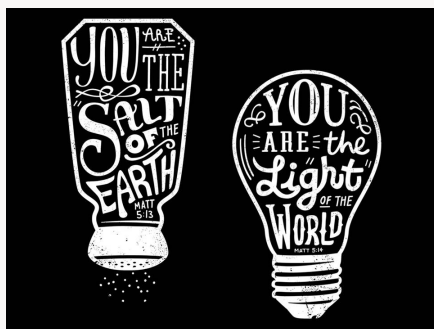
- If being a citizen of the city of God is about being a member of a community of faith, which seeks to enter into God's hearing of the world, then being a responsible citizen of the earthly city involves recognizing that we are all members of a community of fate.

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The parish: a community of faith amidst a community of fate

Being salt and light:



- As members of various communities of fate we are to follow what Christ says in Matthew 5 (13-14) and be salt – that is, working with others to preserve what is good and upholding peace and justice where possible; and
- As members of the Christian community of faith we are to be light, pointing the way in the darkness to the judgment and redemption of all things in Christ.

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