

## “... A COLD AND BROKEN HALLELUJAH”

### SUNDAY ORDINARY 11 C

FOR JUNE 13, 2010 – CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Last weekend – Corpus Christi,  
Fr. Val spoke of us coming forward in the communion line  
each with our own “story” – I think he said  
a “kaleidoscope” of stories.  
I couldn’t help but think of King David  
and his encounter with Bathsheba  
which we heard a few moments ago.

Remember King David – the fair-haired shepherd boy  
who defeated a giant named Goliath;  
the wise Jewish ruler who united the tribes of Israel as a nation;  
the powerful warrior,  
the cunning diplomat,  
the talented musician  
the man after God’s own heart?

With all the tremendous accolades,  
the foundation of King David’s faith  
can be traced to a period  
of severe trial and doubting in his life.

The Jewish songwriter Leonard Cohen  
has been called “the poet laureate of pessimism”  
and “the godfather of gloom.”  
It is said that he had “an abiding sense of tragedy  
which sustained him through temporary  
periods of joy.”

He certainly doesn’t write the kind of songs  
guaranteed to get a party off to a rousing start.  
Maybe the lyrical, melancholy sound of his songs,  
combined with our first reading from Samuel  
have drawn me to two of his songs –  
*Hallelujah* and *Anthem*.

*Hallelujah* you may remember was the mesmerizing song  
sung by K D Lang at the opening ceremony  
of the Vancouver Winter Olympics last February.  
It’s a song filled with biblical references  
and it has become increasingly in demand  
since it was written in 1984.

So, how did a lyrical, slow-moving tune  
become so widespread in this culture of hip-hop and rap?

Why has this song been used to create atmosphere  
and mood in the soundtracks of movies and TV shows?  
Why can't people seem get enough of this song *Hallelujah*?

Simply because it embodies a real and gritty spirituality.  
It's not afraid to embrace the tragedy of human life.  
As Leonard Cohen sings in his song *Anthem*:

*There's a crack, there's a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.*

There is always a crack, even in the midst of profound suffering.  
At the beginning of the song *Hallelujah*, King David,  
the wonderful composer of psalms praising God,  
has happily discovered a "secret chord" that gives God joy.  
But soon the king falls to temptation – listen to the words:

*Your faith was strong, but you needed proof  
You saw her bathing on the roof  
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you.*

All the accolades of King David were overthrown –  
toppling into the dust.  
The man who composed such beautiful psalms of praise  
and whose strength was the envy of all,  
now found himself in a stark and barren place.

When we fall to sin, we wake up to bitterness.  
We realize that sometimes love is not the easy triumph we once imagined it to be – listen to the  
words:

*Our love is not a victory march  
It's cold and it's a broken Hallelujah.*

When we find ourselves in desolation  
we ask ourselves:  
How can we stay alive when we have kissed death?  
Is faith even still possible?  
Has love lost its savor and sweetness?  
King David and all of us are vulnerable,  
exposed to the chill of a spiritual wasteland.

Yet we need not surrender to despair;  
instead we can find our way to a new way  
of hoping and praising God,  
though one without sugary sweetness  
and false romanticism.  
We no longer come before God with full arms,  
but only with empty hands – again the words:

*And even though it all went wrong  
I'll stand before the Lord of Song  
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah*

This song gives voice to our spiritual hunger  
and expresses our human frailty  
and our desire to be released  
from the shallowness of our culture.

Though this reading from Kings  
paints a picture of utter trial and turmoil  
in King David's life,  
yet he maintained an internal compass  
that always pointed to "True North."

While some of us strive for happiness  
that's external and temporary.  
David teaches us to drive towards a place  
of deeper well-being, where we develop trust  
and hope in God that extends beyond  
the external and temporary happiness  
our culture affords us.

So as we approach the Lord's table this morning,  
let us not come before God with full arms,  
but with empty hands – and as the song says:

*And even though it all went wrong  
I'll stand before the Lord of Song  
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah*

- Lyrics from the songs *Anthem* and *Hallelujah* by Leonard Cohen
- Inspired by an article in *America* magazine by Thomas G. Casey, S.J.