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February 5, 2006: *Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time*
Our Lady Queen of Peace

This week, we see some major players as we consider what it is like to live in the presence of God. The church brings us to consider some folks in the liturgy of the word. Today, I would like for three people to preach to us:

Mrs. Job.

Peter's mother-in-law

Coretta Scott-King

First, Mrs. Job. If we think that Job had great suffering in terms of his losses, don't you think that his wife felt as deeply, if not more? After all, she, too, lost a livelihood. She, too, had to bury their seven sons and three daughters, and she had to nurse her husband's leprosy. Job's wife may have had it rougher than Job himself. She found herself in the presence of God, and she was left with the only she had. Her experience and her feelings about it. It is no wonder that she speaks the great words in Chapter 2 of the Book of Job:

"Are you still holding to your innocence? Curse God and die." (2:7)

She told her husband the truth—her truth—in love. Perhaps this experience, this gentle, slap therapy allowed Job finally to the adult faith that climaxes in the last chapter of the book.

"I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you." (42:5)

Job needed the truth-telling service of his wife in order to grow into the adult faith that was necessary to deal with the trauma of his life.

Second, Peter's mother-in-law. A woman who was sick. Very sick. She places her hand and her trust in Jesus', and she is cured. I wonder about her. Now, she was a Jewish mother. She was probably very in love with her daughter. And, she recently learns that her daughter's husband is leaving her to follow this man named Jesus. I wonder if she had any feelings about her son-in-law Peter. Or, about this man Jesus for whom he was leaving her daughter. Yet, she is able to rise above all this. She literally rises out of her sickness and moves into service. The translation really is "waits on."

Finally, Coretta Scott King. She lived in the presence of God and the pain of people who lived without God in their lives. She, like the wife of Job, may have known the suffering of her husband better than her husband. When her great husband was in jail 80 times, she was raising four children by herself. When the country was canonizing her husband, she had to make sense of his sins. When people only loved his dream, she had to hold his nightmares as well.

Permit me to quote at length from Barbara Reynolds, a minister and Howard University professor, who served as Mrs. Scott King's biographer.

"Before I was a King, I was a Scott," she said. "We were landowners and independent thinkers. If I had been a weak, fearful woman, Martin would have been forced to pull back or curtail some of his campaigns, but I brought to the marriage a spirit of not only my mother's discernment but my father's strength.

"I was a partner in the movement. When whites bombed our home in Montgomery, Alabama, I was in the home with my infant daughter. We could have been killed, but I refused to give in to fear, because I had a wonderful role model, my father, Obadiah, who, like Martin, was one of the most fearless men I ever met."

"Through it all my father never hated those who did that terrible thing," she said. "He just picked himself up and fearlessly started over again. My burned-out home prepared me for the fires next time in Montgomery. My father, like his father before him, served as the preacher's steward and chairman of the trustee board of our African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. His example of forgiveness deepened my understanding of the commitment needed to face and eventually triumph with love over hate.

"I had no problem being the wife of Martin, but I was never just a wife. In the 1950s, as a concert singer, I performed 'freedom concerts' raising funds for the movement. I ran my household, raised my children, and spoke out on world issues. Maybe people didn't know that I was always an activist because the media wasn't watching. I once told Martin that although I loved being his wife and a mother, if that was all I did I would have gone crazy. I felt a calling on my life from an early age. I knew I had something to contribute to the world. The movement and building the King Center, speaking out on important causes, that is what God called me to do. I was married to the man whom I loved, but I was also married to the movement. . . . I've had the honor of working alongside America's greatest spiritual and moral leader. I never saw my own life as personal, outside of the collective good. I never separated my love of family, church and community."

If Martin Luther King, Jr. had the courage to conceive of our national dream, Coretta Scott King gave him the comfort and confidence and tenderness to rest and sleep to dream the dream. Her fidelity in the presence of God calls us home today as we pray her home Tuesday.

Three women today call us to pay attention to how we live in the presence of God. Job's wife and Peter's mother-in-law remain unnamed in the Scriptures. This points not to their lack of importance, but their ability to stand as representatives of the countless women and men of faith who number the followers of the God of all creation. Job's wife had the courage to speak the truth in love. Peter's mother-in-law had the ability to rise above her hurts and disappointments to serve in God's presence. And, Coretta Scott King had the fidelity and perseverance of a saint.

We live in the presence of God. As we celebrate this Eucharist, wherein we recommit to the life of Christ, shall we be more courageous to speak the truth in love? Will we rise

above the smallness of life to serve? Will our fidelity and perseverance tap into the dream that our God has for us?

Jesus grasped the hand of Peter's mother-in-law. She let him help her. Do we have the strength of these three women to let the Holy Spirit of our gentle God help us as we live in the same presence of our one, true God?