

American Psychosis Homily

Rev. Barbara F. Meyers © 2015

The book *American Psychosis* by E. Fuller Torrey, which we will be reading in our book-read begins with the story of Rosemary Kennedy.

Rosemary

- Mild retardation since birth in 1918, fiercely protected by the family
 - possibly genetic,
 - possibly trauma at birth,
 - possibly influenza exposure in utero in 1918
- Achieved 4th – 5th grade level in math and English with private tutors
- At age 21 she was living in a convent in England while her father, Joseph Kennedy, was ambassador to England, functioning at an appropriate level socially
- Started to experience severe mood swings, rages, screaming and sometimes violent behavior. Family sources now admit that she had a psychotic mental illness, perhaps schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder, for several years. This was a family secret for many years.
- When family returned to the US at the start of WW II, she was sent to live in a convent. She went missing many times, walking through the streets at night. Her family was seriously concerned that something serious might befall her and affect the family's political ambitions.
- Joseph Kennedy arranged for a lobotomy, which was an unmitigated disaster. She went from mildly retarded to severely retarded, no longer able to wash, dress, and most of her ability to speak.
- Eventually sent to a convent in Wisconsin where she lived into her 80's
- Effect on the family was severe: As Torrey relates: "The lobotomy is an emotional divide in the history of the Kennedy family. ... Plane crashes and assassinations can be viewed as acts of God,

but the lobotomy was an act of a Kennedy. Rosemary's tragedy was a family sin that demanded expiation. That opportunity would present itself in 1960 when John F. Kennedy was elected president."

JFK's interest in this issue resulted in the starting of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) – which he signed into being in October 1963, one of his last acts as President.

- The architect of the NIMH was Robert H. Felix who had a vision of replacement of the overcrowded state mental hospitals with local out-patient clinics.
- Goal: Prevent mental illness by offering marriage counseling, recreational activities, special classes and other social initiatives – something that had never been proved to be possible for severe mental illness. The psychiatrists working on the program felt that they were making history with a "grand experiment"
- A limited number of local clinics were built offering these new programs without any link with the state hospitals which they were supposed to replace. Patients were discharged with nowhere to go.

We know the end point. Many of them ended up in the streets and jails which are where many severely mentally ill people are still located today.

The book goes into the details of what happened:

- The effect of court rulings about patient's rights
- How Medicare and Medicaid, created by the Johnson administration, became two of the most important forces driving the emptying of state mental hospitals
- How the states stopped spending money on mental health programs because of the role of the federal government

The book also offers some possible solutions. Some of them are controversial, and we will present both sides of those issues in our book-read.

Torrey concludes, “We are now spending 12 times more on mental health services than we were 50 years ago. What we are purchasing with those funds is a disgrace.”

He quotes Frank Wright’s book *Out of Sight, Out of Mind*, “We have allowed intolerable conditions to exist for the mentally ill through our ignorance and indifference. We can no longer afford to disregard their needs, to turn a deaf ear to their call for help. We must come face to face with the facts.”

We will give you an opportunity to come I hope you come face to face with the facts, and join us in the book-read, giving you the opportunity to start to become part of the solution.

Welcome!

We are so glad to see you today and have you with us at this sacred time. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are WELCOME here.

No matter how you arrived, no matter how dressed up or down you are, you are WELCOME here.

Whether you rolled in on wheels, ran in on little feet, walked in or ambled in, you are WELCOME here.

Whatever your abilities, whatever your resources, you are WELCOME here.

No matter who you love, you are WELCOME here.

We are a congregation that is with you on the journey.

- Announcements –

In order of service

Two special announcements

- Jen King

- Allysson McDonald

Invocation

Don't leave your broken heart at the door;
bring it to the altar of life.

Don't leave your anger behind;
it has high standards
and the world needs vision.

Bring them with you,
and your joy
and your passion.

Bring your loving,
and your courage
and your conviction.

Bring your need for healing,
and your power to heal.

here is work to do
and you have all that you need to do it
right here in this room.

- Angela Herrera

Benediction: #700

For all who see God, may God go with you.

For all who embrace life, may life return your affection.

For all who seek a right path, may a way be found ...

And the courage to take it, step by step.

- By Robert Mabry Doss

Go in peace, go in joy, go in love, and remember, we are never alone.