

Homily for Sunday, June 28, 2020

(2 Kings 4:4-12a, 14-16; Rom. 6:3-4, 8-11; Mt. 10:37-42)

Within this Sunday's three readings there are a couple of themes which dovetail well with each other, themes prominent in our Christian life. Theme one is **dying** and being buried with Christ in baptism, and theme two is about **hospitality**.



The first reading and gospel have to do with hospitality. We hear in the Book of Kings about a wealthy woman who welcomes the prophet Elisha into her house and something good happens to her as a result. In the same vein of welcoming, Jesus, in the gospel, speaks about the reward of welcoming an apostle, or a prophet, or a righteous person, or a little one with simply a cup

of cold water. The second reading, Paul's letter to the Romans, deals with dying with Christ. I think the dying we are to do leads to hospitality. There has to be a little bit of dying of self on the road to becoming a hospitable person. If we die to ourselves, we build bridges to other peoples' lives. But the risk is you never know who will cross that bridge into your life. If we don't die, we build walls and never become hospitable. Walls keep you safe, but with walls you will live and die impoverished in so many ways.

Cynthia Bourgeault, an Episcopal (Anglican) priest from Maine and a very good spiritual writer, writes this in one of her books: ***“Everything that frightens us is something helpless that wants our love.”*** If I could alter her words a little, I would say, ***“Everyone who frightens us is someone who wants our love.”*** Is there someone, maybe an addict, who frightens you, who simply wants your love whether they kick the addiction or not? Is there someone whose lifestyle frightens you, someone who simply wants your love but maybe does not know how to ask for it? Since they frighten us, we tend not to move towards them with love or hospitality. This is where I think “dying and being buried with Christ in baptism” and “hospitality” complement one another.

What is it that frightens us? The unknown. That is precisely what makes hospitality difficult. We even have an expression, do we not, that says, "I would rather deal with the devil I know than the devil I don't know." Even the best of us do not welcome the unknown easily. Perhaps the greatest unknown that frightens us is not someone's addiction or someone's lifestyle but our own death. The last time I checked nobody has come back to tell us what it is like on the other side of death, and so we live by faith... and a little bit of fear.

There is an archetype (ruling image) within us called the Scout. We send the Scout out to check things out and report back to us before we commit to something. For example, I like picking up hitchhikers. I will pick up anyone as long as they are not standing on the side of the road carrying a bloodied machete. However, before I commit myself to picking them up, the Scout archetype goes out ahead of me to "scout" out the situation. If the Scout reports back to me that this looks like a dangerous person, I pass them by. But most times, I am willing to take a chance and pick them up. This is similar to what we all do in the world of relationships. Before you commit to a relationship, your Scout goes out to gather information about the other person. The Scout within you tells you whether this is a person who is trustworthy of your love, your emotions, your inner secrets. The same goes for exploring job opportunities. Your Scout goes ahead and finds out as much about the job you are applying for and if this will be a good match for you. In the world of hospitality, we are all cautious, and we are always using the Scout. We tend not to welcome people into our space and into our lives without a little risky letting go. What is the other word for "letting go?" Dying. Every little death you have experienced was a rehearsal, of sorts, for the ultimate letting go when you eventually die. Letting go takes practice and is a necessary requirement in order to be a hospitable person.

Jesus says, and I am totally paraphrasing him, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must learn to let go of everything that is penultimate (one step short of the ultimate) like father, mother, sons and daughters. The trade off is that you will embrace something that is ultimate, something that is of God. Jesus says,



“Everyone who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will receive 100 times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, children and land and--the ultimate thing-- eternal life!” So, it seems hospitality begins with an initial letting go, a dying to self so that we can make room for the other. Every time you put someone else first, you were being a hospitable person and, in that moment, you brought heaven to earth. Jesus thinks you can bring heaven to earth by simply offering a cup of cold water to a little one.

Today’s gospel story is about Jesus addressing the 12 apostles just before sending them out on mission. They are to speak and act in his name. They are his emissaries. If you welcome them, you are really welcoming the one who sent them, Jesus. So, if you welcome an apostle, you are welcoming Jesus. If you welcome a prophet, you will get a prophet’s reward. If you welcome a righteous person, you will get a righteous person’s reward. And if you welcome a thirsty person by giving them a cup of cold water, you will be rewarded.

Notice the focus of this gospel story is ***not*** about apostles, prophets, righteous people, or thirsty people. This story is about the one who welcomes the apostle (the one who comes in Jesus’ name), the one who welcomes the prophet, the one who welcomes the righteous one, and the one who welcomes the thirsty ones.

While he walked this earth, Jesus was the epitome of hospitality. He welcomed and dined with sinners and outcasts of all kinds. Jesus had no inner or outer circles, in fact, he had no circles at all. Jesus did not see sinners and outcasts as shady characters who should not be trusted; instead he saw brothers and sisters. He warned us that if we only welcome those who welcome us, there is no grace in that, for even those who do not believe in God will do that much for each other. So, what about us who do believe in God?

Being a hospitable person is much more than taking a risk picking up a hitchhiker. Hospitality, before it is an action, is always an attitude. Usually when we make room for people, something really good happens in return. The wealthy woman in the first reading who welcomed Elisha did not feel wealthy until she had a son. This was the wonderful return resulting from the fact that she risked welcoming a stranger into her life. What riches await us in the world of hospitality?

Fr. Phil