

Homily for Sunday, Sept. 19th, 2021 – 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Although the Son of Man is guided by the hand of God, he will be killed by human hands. Jesus has come to terms with that; the disciples clearly have not. The problem, with the way the disciples are thinking, is the same problem with the way the disciples were thinking in last Sunday's gospel when Jesus said, ***"Get behind me. For you are thinking not as God does, but as humans do."*** I always thought we were humans and, therefore, it would be perfectly normal to think like a human being. Wrong! If our starting point is that we are human beings trying to become a little more

spiritual rather than spiritual beings striving to become fully human, we will make all the wrong moves. Maybe that is why Jesus has to put a child—who, by the way, says nothing—in the midst of the disciples. It is to remind them that their starting point, their primary identity, is that they are children of God.

You already are *spiritual*; your job is to become fully *human*. Think of how Jesus's earthly ministry starts. It starts in the waters of baptism where he hears the words of truth from none other than God. God says, ***"You are my beloved, on you my favor rests."*** That truth, in my mind, is the starting point of all healthy spirituality. All other starting points eventually lead to dead ends. But here comes the warning: if your starting point is that you are by nature spiritual, that you are the beloved of God, then you can expect troubles. To quote Jesus at the Last Supper, ***"In the world you will have hardships but be courageous: I have overcome the world."***

If you think like God, or like a child of God, and not like a human being, you can expect opposition. Just expect it. Don't be naïve about it; just expect it. Those who have their minds on human things will actually try to do away with people who have their minds set on God. That was our first reading was it not? ***"Let us ambush the righteous one because he makes life inconvenient to us...let us test him with insults and torture...let us condemn him to a shameful death."*** Don't tell me these scriptures are not naming something about our world today. Currently, there is a political advertisement featuring our own prime minister, and the sole purpose is to condemn and shame politicians and healthcare workers who would conscientiously object to abortion and euthanasia as backward thinking. It's not enough we don't live with a conscience; we have to shame those who do.

The disciples, in today's gospel, also are not thinking like God, or children of God. And because of that, they dismiss the message of Jesus, the one who is thinking like God, the one who knows he is God's son. Their thoughts are about avoiding suffering at all cost and, secondly, about pursuing status. Here is a wonderful quote from Brennan Manning: ***"In our society, where money, power, and pleasure are the name of the game, the body of truth is bleeding from a thousand wounds."*** The truth will always be perceived as being inconvenient, yet it never stops being the truth.

Where Jesus is talking about freely *giving* everything away including his life, the disciples are talking about *taking* things unto themselves like power and prestige and about who will be considered the greatest in the eyes of the world. Today's gospel story goes on to say: ***But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.*** Since their focus was completely on themselves, they naturally were afraid for themselves. So, they fear to ask Jesus anything that might sniff of danger and might take them away from their dreams of glory. Their rationale probably went something like this: better not to ask what it means to follow Jesus, because he might just have to tell us something we don't want to hear.

The scripture ended with Jesus taking a little child into his arms. I'd like to end similarly with a story about a child who grows up. Again, it is a reflection from the late Brennan Manning on an experience he had. He writes:

Ironically, it was the same day, December 13, twelve years later that I went to pray in the parish church in Tamarac, Florida, at two in the afternoon. The usual tenor of my prayer—life is dryness, longing, and experiencing the absence of God in the hope of communion. But the moment I knelt down my mind was filled with the image of a three-year-old boy playing on the rug in his living room. Off in the corner his mother sat on the floor in the lotus position, knitting. Suddenly she dropped her work and beckoned to him. He toddled over and climbed up on her lap. She smiled down at him and asked softly, "How much do you love me?" He extended his tiny arms as far as they could go and exclaimed, "This much I love you." In an instant, it was thirty years later; the little boy in the fullness of manhood hung nailed to a crossbeam. His mother looked up and said, "How much do you love me?" His arms were stretched out to the ends of the universe. "This much I love you." And he died. (A Glimpse of Jesus, p. 41)

"In the world you will have hardships but be courageous: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

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