

Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Living With Our Faults

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A prophet is not recognized among his own people. Jesus experiences the truth of that truism today. He proclaims himself the bread of life. Do we find that hard to believe? Do those he has healed? the poor the lame, the sick, the sinner, do they have any problem with such a statement? On the contrary, Jesus has to keep telling them to keep quiet. To not run off and make him King. But for those who knew him as he was growing up, they find this all a bit much.

Ironically, its their very familiarity with Jesus that blinds his neighbors to who he is. He is just like us, they say. How can he be from God? Love your neighbor as yourself, Jesus says. But that is not good news for your neighbor if you do not treat yourself very well. On the contrary sometimes we have to ask ourselves if we would ever treat someone else as harshly as we treat ourselves.

We all have our faults. We are all sinners. I am not sure that this is the same thing though. Sins are deliberate, but some of our faults are not deliberate, they are simply facts about us. Psychological facts rather than physical facts, but facts nonetheless. Its not that we should not try to correct our faults, or overcome our limitations, but a lifetime of wrestling with our faults can itself be the source of some of our greatest gifts. If nothing else they can school us in compassion... for others, if not always for ourselves.

Achieving holiness is hard not because it involves transcending our limitations, but because it involves living within them. Holiness may mean wholeness, but it does not mean a life without holes.

A nun friend of mine who died of breast and bone cancer just over years ago now, once wrote:

I like to think of myself as lace,
where God is all the empty space.
Oh, to be lace where the light

Flows through beautifully
Patterning me for you.

To see the holes in our lives as openings to God's grace—places not where God is absent but where God can be found, that is the trick to real holiness—not soft-edged, pastel colored holy cards, but a life of holes through which God's grace can shine through.

Take the church of Ephesus in today's second reading. The early converts began so filled with the spirit, but as time goes on, they begin to bicker. Is the church of Ephesus disintegrating, or is it becoming real, a true community? It will depend not on its members remaining blind to one another's faults, but on how they treat one other now that they know each other's faults only too well.

At times of stress and strain in relationships, we need to remember what drew us together in the first place. You have all been sealed by the Holy Spirit of God, Paul reminds the Ephesians. We are all children of the Heavenly Father, proclaims Jesus. So too with ourselves, when our limitations are only too evident, it's good to remember our gifts, and how our limitations may themselves be a kind of gift, may in fact lie at the root of some of our greatest gifts.

To love ourselves, if not for our own sake then for others sake. In fact, even for God's sake even. For as a child of God, in slighting ourselves are we not indirectly slighting God? When we receive a gift, we appreciate what is good about it, we don't pick at its flaws. Should we not try to appreciate God's gifts similarly—especially his greatest gift of all that he gives to each one of us, each day of our lives, ourselves? We literally are God's gift to mankind—not just me or you, but all of us, each in our own way, faults and all.

Ironically, it's often through our love for someone else, that we can come to love ourselves. It's by forgiving our neighbor, that we can learn to forgive ourselves. Jesus is the bread of life because Jesus calls us back to the truth that we can so easily neglect. That all life is precious however commonplace. All life is precious, even our own.

So yes, there are holes in our lives, holes of our own doing, holes drilled into us by others, holes thanks to circumstances, holes inherited from birth. We

are riddled with holes. Are we like the walls of a room after a gunfight? Or like Swiss cheese? Or like French bread? Or like lace? That is up to us.