

Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

Incarnation into the Ordinary

July 08, 2018

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Today we hear once more the story of Jesus' return home, and the rejection he found there. Why was it that those who had lived with him since he was a child, those whom one would think would know him best, why were they the very ones who had no time for him, who could place no faith in his words?

According to our story their unbelief was due precisely to his being so familiar to them. "Is this not the carpenter's son?" We know this guy--they say to themselves. Who does he think he is? Where does he come off preaching and teaching like this? Come on! He's one of us.

And as I have mentioned many times before, the Greek word for "carpenter" in today's reading really means construction worker, like you guys were when you built our church.

What are Jesus' friends and neighbors saying? He's one of us, so he can't be from God? What are they saying? That if he were truly from God, he would not be like them? That if he were truly from God he wouldn't be a construction worker, but someone extraordinary? But the paradox is that Jesus' mission from God was precisely to be one of us. The paradox is that it is his ability to be just like us, a common and ordinary person, that makes him so extraordinary; that makes him our savior. For in being from God and yet like us, he wakes us up to just who we really are, and just where we really come from.

This is part of the Good News that Jesus preached: that God is to be found in the ordinary and the everyday. So turn around, wake up, don't take your life for granted. You only have one life to live, don't live it under a bushel basket. So too love your neighbors, don't take them for granted either. We are all sons of God, daughters of our heavenly Father. The Kingdom of heaven is already beginning right here, right now. You who have eyes to see, look. You with ears to hear, listen. Pay attention to what is all around you.

Its not a bad definition of prayer--using our eyes to look at what God is showing us, using our ears to listen to what God is telling us -- and not to take it for granted but to appreciate it--to thank God for it.

Note God's complaint against his people in today's first reading from Ezekiel: "They and their fathers have revolted against me to this very day. They are hard of face and obstinate of heart." The Jews had come to ignore their God, they have come to take God for granted. Jesus calls upon us to soften our countenance, and to open our hearts. Jesus calls upon us to be grateful to God for the most common, the most everyday aspects of our lives. To be a follower of Christ does not take living an extraordinary life, it takes a keen sensitivity to discern the presence of the most extraordinary graces at work within the most ordinary events of our everyday lives. To be able to see the face of God, not merely in the great saints, but in the least of one's neighbors--even in the face looking back at us in the mirror.

We all can resonate with Paul's complaint of a thorn in our flesh. We are all weighed down with burdens of one kind or another, afflicted by evils, some of our own doing, but many not. If then we ignore what is good in our lives, if we take the good we do have for granted, if we focus our attention only upon the thorns, picking at them until they bleed, we only end up compounding our sorrow and spreading our pain to those around us. To be channels of God's grace we must believe that despite our burdens, perhaps even through our afflictions, that we ourselves are already blessed; our lives filled with grace as Mary was full of grace though she was but the wife and mother of construction workers. If we are to live with grace we must appreciate how we have been graced ourselves. And to be witnesses to Christ we must indeed have faith--not simply faith in some extraordinary wonder-worker, but faith in a rather ordinary young man, someone like ourselves.

So may we have eyes to see and ears to hear the wonders of our God.