

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jun 18th 2013

The gospel reading for today is summed up in the last sentence: Jesus exhorts his listeners to be perfect. The use of the word perfect made me think of some of the ways in which we use this word in our daily lives. We sometimes speak of a perfect day, a day in which everything turns out well for us. Or a day on which the weather is ideal. We sometimes use the term in the entertainment world when we say that the musical performance was perfect or the work of the actors on stage and screen was perfect. In the world of sports we refer to a perfect game in baseball. And in soccer and hockey we laud the work of the goal tender when that defender refuses to allow the opposing team to score.

Jesus is not using the word perfect in that sense. By speaking of the heavenly Father as perfect he is referring to the divine ideal. Our faith teaches us that God is perfect in every way. Such perfection is difficult for our human minds to grasp since we have no frame of reference for such a concept.

Nothing here on earth is perfect in the way that God is perfect. And so in today's gospel Jesus is telling us to use the perfection of God as an ideal to which we aspire. In effect we are to imitate the perfection of God as best we can in our human condition.

When I think of trying to be perfect my thoughts turn to the saints. They have given us a powerful example of striving for the perfection of which Jesus speaks. But there is some irony here also. Some of the saints about whom I have read felt that they were not making much progress in the search for perfection. Indeed some of them felt that they were among the worst of sinners. I think that such a perception of themselves reveals the difficulty of really striving for perfection. The saints came to realize how far we are from the perfection of God. But what gives me hope and what should inspire us all is that the saints never stopped their efforts to imitate the divine perfection. The words of Jesus in today's gospel are addressed to all of us. He exhorts us to follow the example of the saints and strive to be perfect as best we can.

Tom Bannantine, S.J.