

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 30th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

I had the occasion recently to meet face-to-face four separate people of whom I had “heard of” in years past. I was actually shaking hands with writers and people who are well-known. When I mentioned who I am, they all said the same thing, “Oh, I have heard of you for a long time.” Hmmm, what had they heard! They probably think I am very holy, because I write these Daily Reflections. It is not always easy to live with one’s past or name. They were meeting a me whom they do not really know and a me whom I having been learning about for a long time and there’s more to face.

At the Eucharist we are met face-to-face, histories to histories. We present our gifts, including our poverty, our worries, and our attempts at being more than he knows we are. Jesus offers us his embrace of our truth with his truth of compassion. In a way he says, “Oh, I have heard of you for many years.” We long for affirmation and recognition. The Eucharist is all of that and more. Jesus knows the darkest corners of this “bone house” into which He chooses to come so unshamingly gentle.

REFLECTION

Elijah has had a hard time of it lately. To fully understand today’s First Reading one would need to read the whole 19th chapter from which today’s story is taken. His being a prophet has involved his having other false prophets put to the sword. He has fled the land to a distant place. He has heard God speaking that he, Elijah, must return and anoint several new kings and then the story we hear, the anointing of Elisha as a replacement. He certainly was a busy man.

What we hear today is about Elijah’s coming to Elisha and throwing his cloak over Elisha. The prophetic garment was a symbol of property rights. Elisha receives his state as both servant and possessor of Elijah’s powers of miracles. The transmission is instantaneous and as many times happens in God’s ways of calling, Elisha has an excuse to not respond quickly. As also happens in Scripture, Elisha gets the picture quickly, leaves his former ways and trustingly follows his call.

The Gospel has several distinct and important features. It is a turning point, literally. Jesus from this point on has turned toward Jerusalem where he will be lifted up on the cross and raised up after his resurrection. The word “resolutely” speaks of his determination to fulfill his identity as priest, prophet

and king. From here in these verses, Luke presents Jesus as working slowly upward and directly to the city of Jerusalem. This provides the context for the next section of today's reading.

The group travels into a village of Samaria where they are not welcomed. James and John ask Jesus if they should call down destructive fires on the Samaritans. Jesus rebukes them and they leave having better things to do as they journey. The dispute between Jews and Samaritans is about proper interpretation of scriptures and also about where exactly the proper place of worship is, in which territory has God truly appeared. We read about this also in John 4: 9. Even then until now there is the battle for scriptural turf and possession of the truth.

The third section of today's Gospel is about call and response. Three persons are attracted to Jesus and the disciples. Jesus presents them with the basic principles of being one of his followers. There is an invitation offered to face the tensions between self-possession of one's personal kingdom and self-donation for the Kingdom of God. There are healthy and normal desires for home and family-relations. The Gospel closes with an image of perseverance. Jesus seems to be talking of himself as well as to those who wish to follow him. Fidelity is never an easy journey.

Fifty-three years ago this summer I kissed my last girlfriend goodbye as well as my parents and even my older sister and turned my face resolutely toward Florissant, Missouri and the Jesuit Novitiate. My two best friends drove me and all my worldly possessions toward my adventurous destiny. When we arrived at the beginning of the driveway, half way in, Jim turned off the ignition, turned to me and said, "Gilly, if you want to go any further into this God-forsaken looking place, you turn the key." Without a second thought, I did and the rest is "His-story". My two companions dropped me off and told me that they were staying overnight in St. Louis and would be back at ten the next morning in case I came to my senses. They would be waiting out on the road. At ten the next morning, I stood at my window and smiled when I heard them beep the car horn several times as they set their faces resolutely to get as far away and as fast away as possible. For my part, I turned my face and creative mind toward the possibilities of regaining all or part of the goodies I had brought and turned in so generously the afternoon before. Fidelity to being resolute, I was to find, is not as easy as reading about.

Jesus stayed faithful to his being raised on the cross. He remains faithful to our irresolute turnings toward our own personal establishings of our little kingdoms. Our fidelity is not totally to our commitments, but to his faithful commitment to being our Savior. He saves us from ourselves, our attempts at perfection. How can we live with ourselves who so constantly are not constant? To whom are we faithful? With Paul we moan that all the good we want to do, we do not and those things we would rather not do, well, we easily do them. Our baptismal promises center around Jesus being our personal and universal Savior. We live with ourselves, because he does.

Fifty years later I find myself still trying to figure out ways to regain all that I want to surrender and I get away with it now and then. Then and then again he finds me, turns my face toward a raising of my face toward his kingdom and all he has and continues offering. It has been a great ride toward his rising and my being raised.

“Bless the Lord, o my soul, and all within me, his holy name.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.