

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Nov 26th 2013

Today marks the Feast Day of St. John Berchmans. He is described as a Jesuit scholar, although he died before he was ordained as a priest. In reading about St. John Berchmans, he appears ordinary in many ways, yet his piety distinguished him from others. One source identified that St. John aspired to help and teach multi-lingual migrants. It is clear that John embodied all we hold near and dear. It further stated that John Berchmans was not noted for extraordinary feats of holiness or austerity, nor did he found orders or churches or work flashy miracles. Rather, John's focus was on living his mission in life, he made kindness, courtesy, and constant fidelity an important part of his holiness. John performed ordinary actions with extraordinary perfection. The attainment of that ideal was what John proposed to himself. "If I do not become a saint when I am young," he used to say "I shall never become one." His willingness to serve God was evident in all he did. John had even planned on becoming an army chaplain after ordination with the hope of being martyred on the battlefield... "My penance", he would say, "is to live the common life... I will pay the greatest attention to the least inspiration of God". He observed this fidelity in the performance of all his duties until the last day of his life. The path to holiness can lie in the ordinary rather than the extraordinary. It is this last statement that really caught my attention.

The readings (both the first and the gospel) focus on preparation for the inevitable. How do we assure we are prepared since the signs of when such things will happen is not clear? The life of St. John Berchmans teaches us how to be prepared and how to live a life that will allow us to "not be terrified." Rather, when we do ordinary things in extraordinary ways we are paving the way and readying ourselves. We do have many opportunities for these ordinary things. I feel blessed that I have such opportunities in my life.

Thanks to the gift of a generous donor, two nursing students were able to accompany the "Hernia Team" to the Dominican Republic on a week-long mission trip. My blessing came in that they needed a faculty member on site. Working along side the team to set-up the perioperative areas was a great experience for the students as well as a couple of days observing surgeries and participating in the pre- and post-op/recovery areas. However, the opportunity to participate in the day-to-day lives of the people there came with staying in a campo and providing diabetic foot care to the campesinos. The idea of caring for another's feet is a very humbling and rewarding experience. As you kneel at the feet of your fellow human, you understand the pain for all of us. The touching and examining the feet of another is not always easy but provides a very deep connection. Beyond the spiritual aspects of this is the fact that risks for complications such as amputations can be decreased with adequate foot care. So, indeed, this is an important aspect in comprehensive care for those with diabetes. Sharing meals with the other health providers there including the physician, nurse, and cooperadore de salud (indigenous health care worker) provided another level of connection. Some of the "comforts" that we come to expect were not present (hot water and flushing toilets), yet these seemed a minor annoyance at most as one embraced the human connection. Ordinary things in extraordinary ways!!

My son recently posted a picture on Facebook that warmed my heart. His caption revealed his pride in his children and their actions this past week. What is now becoming a family tradition, my husband and I along with the four grandchildren and son and daughter-in-law packed Christmas “shoe boxes” for less fortunate children across the world. Once again, we viewed some videos on line about what happens to these boxes and who receives them. With minimum chaos, we packed hygiene items, toys, clothing, and small treats into these boxes. What was most rewarding was the engagement of the kids from age 5 to 15 in accomplishing this family project. Each of the grandchildren also made an additional contribution. I explained that it cost \$7.00 to send each of these eight boxes. Without hesitation, each child went to his or her piggy bank or stash (pretty sure my 15 year-old grandson no longer has a “piggy bank”) and returned with the needed \$7.00. The dollars were wrinkled and obviously had been saved for a while but were generously relinquished for the shipping. I share my son’s pride in his children and add in my own pride of a son and daughter-in-law who instill such values in their children and continue to nurture each of them in their spiritual development. I am blessed, indeed!!

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