

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 28th 2014

Author Julian Barnes writes, “I don’t believe in God, but I miss him.” Barnes, like many cultured Brits of his age, cannot bring himself to commit to the God of his inherited Christianity. He likes the ethical framework that faith provides people, but can’t quite accept the reality that it all flows from a living God. And so, throughout his book *Nothing to Be Afraid of*, Barnes ponders how to make sense of life and death without the divine keystone; a keystone which – for believers – holds life’s demands (and fears!) in purposive tension.

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One of those demands is how to love others well, given our limited time, energy, and patience. Busy creatures that we are, we have to prioritize. The scribes in today’s Gospel try to trip up Jesus by asking him his priorities. What, they ask, is the most important commandment? Jesus replies:

Hear, O Israel!

The Lord our God is Lord alone!

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul,

with all your mind,

and with all your strength.

The second is this:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

There is no other commandment greater than these.

I find myself wondering, “Yes, Jesus...that’s all fine, well, and good. But what does ‘love of God’ look like in my daily life? A simple question can help us answer this:

Do my thoughts, words, and actions line up, and point others to God?

Put another way: How do I choose to respond to life's challenges, in light of my faith?

Pope Francis writes in his letter, *Evangelii Gaudium*:

“there is a kind of preaching which falls to each of us as a daily responsibility. It has to do with bringing the Gospel to the people we meet, whether they be our neighbors or complete strangers. This is the informal preaching, which takes place in the middle of a conversation... Being a disciple means being constantly ready to bring the love of Jesus to others, and this can happen unexpectedly and in any place: on the street, in a city square, during work, on a journey.”

For Francis, and for us, love of neighbor is a compelling embodiment of our love of God. We pray for the grace to love our neighbors well, so that our love may inspire others not only to miss the idea of God, but to believe in God -- through us.

Joe Simmons, S.J.