

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 16th 2014

Will the axe boast against him who hews with it?

Will the saw exalt itself above him who wields it?

Isaiah 10:15

As a young physician, I relish every correct diagnosis and successful treatment I provide. It's truly gratifying to personally admit a patient to the hospital one night, initiate a treatment plan, and a day or two later note drastic symptomatic improvement in that patient. These little "accomplishments" make the nine years I've spent in higher education feel justified and important. But what role do I actually play in my patients' health?

Allow me to illustrate with one great organ. I spend a lot of time thinking about the physiology of the nephron in the kidney (a tiny structure that helps filter our blood and produce urine). I discuss the kidney regularly in the hospital with at least a fair grasp of its function. But, I did not design it. I understand a fraction of that organ's incredible beauty, but certainly not near the knowledge of the kidney's Creator. I can monitor its function and, at most, facilitate the improvement of its function, but I am deceiving myself if I try to believe that I have done any more than that.

It's just past 3:00 a.m. here in my hospital call room so I have a little more time to reflect than normal. Perhaps it's this extra solitude combined with the natural self-reflection that comes with the conclusion of my first year as a physician, but I have found myself more frequently pondering what real benefit I have actually provided my patients and colleagues over this past year. Although a degree of confidence goes a long way in this frequently humbling profession, recognizing how small a role I play is maybe healthy for my relationship with God.

Our reading from Isaiah questions, "Will the saw exalt itself above him who wields it?" Equally, who am I to think that any medical success around me has anything to do with my own sharpness? Just like each of us in our respective vocations, I am merely God's instrument.

This recognition of the necessity of humility and the smallness of our roles simply acts as a lesson in character if it stops there. To grasp the Scripture's call we must take it the step further. Rather than simply deflecting the praise and glory, we must redirect it toward our Father. St. Ignatius challenges us beautifully with the goal of living *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* ("For the Greater Glory of God").

Even Jesus, the single human being who has the greatest right to boast, hands the glory and praise to his Father in Heaven, as demonstrated in today's Gospel.

How would each of our professions change if we were to actually give God the praise for each success? When a nurse or family thanks me for helping a patient I should respond with a, "Praise God! He certainly has blessed her!" shouldn't I? When we offer our help or expertise, couldn't we also offer to pray for the issue as well?

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