

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, May 5th 2017

Saul was a very confident fellow who followed through on his convictions. When faced with a rival to his own religious paradigm, he did not simply say, “Meh – let them have their day. Want to get some coffee?” He obtained the proper authority and then set out boldly on a mission. Such bold action is rare in our times, as we are socialized toward reducing conflict, getting along, and going along whenever we can. Yet there is something in Saul’s choice that resonates with us, too. We have all been in situations where we have acted based on incomplete knowledge, perhaps missing an important fact and making an incorrect judgment. It is an uncomfortable moment, which calls for a response. It does not usually come in the dramatic form that Saul experienced. But hopefully we do the right thing and make amends.

Ananias may be a different sort of fellow. When he hears God sending him on a mission, he is already looking for the exit. “Um, do you happen to know what sort of fellow this Saul is, Lord?” This is a sensible question, given Saul’s history. But after Ananias gets the confirmation he needs, he overcomes his fear and follows through with his mission.

I can relate to Ananias’ awareness of the realities of the world in which he must function. But he does not let risk avoidance keep him from living in accord with his faith. By taking a risk, he gets to participate in a miracle. Through his modest act of praying with Saul, Saul’s life is transformed; his mission changes. That new mission takes him right into the synagogue to tell about this Jesus he had previously been resisting so boldly.

For many of us, Ananias’ subtle transformation may seem more realistic than Saul’s dramatic life-changing experience. We are intimately familiar with the sensible question and answer exchange that occurs in quiet moments of prayer, or even in the midst of daily life. That inner prompting to do a kindness for another, for example, presents us with an opportunity and a choice: we can retreat, or we can extend ourselves a little. Having the faith to extend ourselves is often rewarding. But we don’t always get the immediate result that Ananias witnessed, to be sure. A friend recently reminded me that often it takes years to understand the impact we have on others – and this is a good thought. The long view is more complex, but potentially more rewarding.

Today’s gospel is one of the most powerful passages in the book of John. Jesus challenges us with a radical claim about his flesh and blood. For some, this claim will make no sense. Some may even feel duty-bound to resist such a claim, perhaps turning it into a metaphor or otherwise marginalizing it. But when the beauty and truth of the Eucharist is revealed to us, this new paradigm resonates deeply. It is also deeply embedded in the living faith of Christianity, which has been passed down to us in this present day, and which we will continue to transmit until the last generation. Thanks be to God.

Edward Morse-Creighton University's