

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 3rd 2013

We hear our Grandmother God telling us often not to be afraid, be a person of confidence, and trust always in the Lord. These are all quite comforting and our faith does bring us peace, but there are times when we are nervous believers, frightened trustlings, and worried passengers in the barque of Peter. This all means we are quite human beings and experience fears and doubts as naturally as we experience hunger and thirst.

As we pray and wander toward the Eucharist we can check out our little and large fears and doubts and pray, not that they go away, but that we can live with what is so human and good. God's grace meets us where we are and we pray to find ourselves being found.

REFLECTION

We hear in our First Reading for this liturgy a two-part prayer or prophesy made by God and spoken through the words of Jeremiah. God speaks firstly of how God had known and prepared Jeremiah even from the womb. Secondly, and based on the first, God indicates a future in which Jeremiah will have to speak the Word of God to Jeremiah's fellow Israelites and they will not like what he has to say. The Reading ends with confirming verses of strength and power to resist the external forces which will attempt to crush him and the internal voices which will attempt to paralyze his vocation.

Last Sunday's Gospel ended with the same setting which begins today's Gospel. Jesus had read in the synagogue a passage from Isaiah which Jesus tells his listeners that he himself is the One who fulfills this same prophetic announcement. All his hearers speak well of this hometown product and rub their hands together in delightful anticipation of all the good things Jesus is going to do for them.

Jesus realizes this in his neighbors and speaks quite directly to them about their self-centered excitement. They had heard all the great miracles that Jesus had done elsewhere. They assume he will naturally do even greater deeds for them. What Jesus speaks to them changes their acceptance and excitement into anger toward and rejection of him.

Jesus makes two historical and so, scriptural references about two situations, about which his hearers were acquainted. Both refer to persons - a widow, (1 Kings 17, 1) and a leper, (2 Kings 5, 14) - who were miraculously cared for by God through Elijah in the first instance and Elisha in the second. These God-cared for persons were not Jews nor lived in Israel. The Widow and Naaman, the leper, were externs, foreigners and quite excluded.

The synagogue congregation knew instantly what Jesus was saying by making these references. Clearly Jesus was telling them that faith more than family familiarity was required for miracles and they did not have faith that he was the fulfillment of what he had just read to them. Jesus got what he deserved from his former neighbors. He insulted them and they wanted to get rid of this preposter. He is led out to the brink of a hill, but slips away to live toward his final life's statement on an other hill where he will again experience what it means to him to be Savior.

After this weekend there is one more Sunday before Lent begins. We will continue hearing from Luke's account of the invitation Jesus is offering His disciples and us as well. I live in a culture of individualism which in a strange way is a contradiction in terms. A culture is what we wish to pass along to those who follow us. It is intended to continue and advance the group or community. Individualism has little concern for the common good or those who will follow, except how that group can advance the individual. This spirit is so in the cultural air that we can assume slowly that it is what is good. We can say that what is good for me will eventually be good for all.

Jesus is inviting us these days of our conversion to follow him toward his sisters and brothers and change the basic self-centered question into "What's in it for them?" Jesus insulted his neighbors by what he said and what he did. Faith is an insult to the scientifically data-based spirit of our day. Hope is an insult to the desperately-communicating tell-me-who I- am cell-phoney world. Love is an insult to our strip-me and leave-me half dead, society. Trusting, longing and cherishing are cultural and worth the passing along as Jesus did and lived. He called individuals from alone to along and beside. We see Him in today's Gospel begin his own cultural revolution. The Great Insultor "passed out of their midst" and is patiently entering ours.

"Let your face shine on your servant, and save me by your love. Lord, keep me from shame, for I have called to you. Ps. 31, 17-18

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