

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Feb 10th 2013

We move along ordinary, (the word means “ordered” or “orderly” not boring), days which have their unordinary moments. The liturgy of the Eucharist is an ordinary exercise of an extra-ordinary event. The grace of the Eucharist experienced in community, moves us out and back to the orderly living of this unusual vision of life which is Christianity.

We prepare for the celebration of this weekend’s liturgy by receiving the sacraments of each moment, each person, each invitation and interruption. God is never not-giving, not-offering, not preparing us for living what we receive. Grace orders or gives form to chaos and disorder.

REFLECTION

A week ago, here in the United States, there was the playing of the championship of professional football, a/k/a Super Bowl Sunday. The contest was between the Baltimore Ravens, (their team name derives from the famous poem by Edgar Allen Poe who was born in Baltimore) and the San Francisco 49ers, (named for the gold prospectors who came to northern California in 1849). These two teams represented their respective cities. Millions of people gathered to watch the game on TV of course, but those who do not know much about football watched, yes it is a fact, the commercials. The TV company even allowed total access to all the commercials at any time. Companies spend millions of dollars for a thirty second spot for their most creative advertisings. So there were in fact two contests and two winners: one athletic and the other financial. Even the advertisements get evaluated and rated by experts.

The first advertisement on behalf of God in today’s Eucharistic liturgy is from the Book of Isaiah and is the narrative of his being called. Isaiah is in the temple and has the vision of which we hear. He is aware that he is in the presence of the very Holy One of Israel. His response is natural and healthy. The closer the Holy, the less holy seems the human.

The seraphim (the name means “The Burning One” in Hebrew) takes a coal from the altar’s fire and touches the lips of the prophet-to-be. He knows he is like the people with whom he lives and to whom he will be sent to advertise the holiness of God. He then hears the voice of God asking about whom

God might send. Isaiah, now unburdened by his own sin, responds immediately.

Sanctified means more than made holy by purging, it implies also a separating from and a separating for. Isaiah will be sent into his people, trusting what he has heard and seen; trusting the holy he has received. God has certain ways of getting our attention. Isaiah was in the temple, because he had nothing else to do? No, there was something inside him which was available and receptive to the vision and the mission.

Peter in today's Gospel, was doing his usual thing, except the fish were not available nor receptive to Peter's ways of catching them. This emptiness allowed him in turn to be available for the reception of both good fishing advice and a Super Bowl of fish. Jesus was in his teaching mode advertising his new way of looking at one's self, one's neighbors and one's world. As any good teacher does, Jesus is going to employ a visual aid. He presents Peter with a vision, a Super Something by which he will catch Peter's attention and spirit. As with Isaiah, Peter's response is self-inflicted shame and negativity. Peter does say his truth, "I am a sinful man." Jesus does not deny that. Actually following Jesus will reveal even more of that self-truth to Peter.

The wonderful reality is that while Peter will be finding out just how true his statement is, he, Peter, will have a vision constantly of the personal love which Jesus has for Peter and others such as he.

With such a super-abundant catch of fish, Peter is caught himself. He was available to the call of Jesus, because Jesus came into his boat, came through his door. He came to Peter according to Peter. As a result of the action, vision, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Peter sees his poverty made rich and when Jesus invited him, what could he do, but follow, leaving his nets, boats and everything except wanting more.

In watching or reading advertisements one thing is always present: they make sure you know that you have a need. That need may be medical, financial, social, or for security. After the advertiser convinces you of your need, the product is presented as the only need-filling solution. We may never have averted to that need, but they can convince us we have it.

Jesus is beginning to collect his team of advertising agents. The liturgy and the Gospels continue calling us by helping us sense a deeper need than commercials can touch. The emptiness of Peter's nets is a worthy symbol. He certainly had to face the fact of his not having, not being the fisherman he

wanted to be and thought he was. This self-inflicted negativity is a normal response to a something, a certain not being which is characteristic of us as humans. Commercial advertisers offer us products which will touch slightly this zero-point, this nothingness which hums quietly all the time and now-and-then shouts out.

Jesus embraced our humanity by being one of us, born with us, come fishing with us. He embraces Peter's emptiness, fills it, but just temporarily. Peter will want more, want to be more, have more. That human-humming is a gift of the Creator which allows our availability to the more of God's love. The most difficult thing about our being human is living as a human. Jesus came to save us, not only from damnation, and not from being human, but from being sucked in by all the false advertisers of this world who want us to run and hide from our being human and embraced by God. Peter was freed from the negativity of being a poor fisherman and given the mission of continuing the divine embrace to all his brothers and sisters.

We may have enjoyed watching the Super Bowl and perhaps enjoyed even more the commercials. Perhaps, like me, you counted how many needs they tried to convince you that you had and have. We can Give the best ones our highest rating and begin laughing at how gullible they think we are - and they're right.

"In the sight of the angels will sing your praises, Lord." Ps. 138

Larry Gillick, S.J.