

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Apr 21st 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

We prepare for the Eucharist in similar ways to how we prepare for encounters with friends. Perhaps we dress up in our finest, wanting to appear attractive and welcoming. We might think of topics for conversation or jokes or the latest news which we might want to share. We might think of the various people who we will meet and enjoy. We might begin to enjoy their presence even before we arrive. We could think of the individual histories of those same friends and perhaps we might meet new and interesting people who will be there as well.

The Eucharist celebration waits to welcome us personally and communally. We enter this gathering by blessing ourselves with the water of our original baptismal welcome. We bring our personal histories and mingle them with those of the others also welcomed by Baptism. As with our attending any party or celebration, we go to assist and we go to be assisted back out after the party, celebration. We prepare to receive into our hands the permanent pledge that we belong to the Christ whose hands we are placed by God's choice and love. We prepare this week by living in his hands and not allowing anyone or anything to take us from them.

REFLECTION

We are enjoying the works of the Spirit in our hearing each week from the Acts of the Apostles. These preachers of the Word have their ups and downs and somehow they come out of their predicaments with the Spirit still winning. Conversations about Jesus do bring about conversions, but also controversy. The old is so familiar and the new can be a threat.

So we hear in today's Readings how Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue and while there began proclaiming the Word. They were confronted by jealousy and violent rejection of certain factions of the Jewish leadership. So they finished what they had to say and then made a dramatic statement of orientation.

"We now turn to the Gentiles" as it has been written that they, the apostles, are to be a "light" to all the nations. Persecution by some of the Jewish leaders and being expelled, gave Paul and Barnabas courage and the Gentiles joy to be included into the people of God. Resistance does create energy and

Paul, with his fellow apostles, received plenty of both.

One of the great themes of the second part of John's Gospel, The Book of Glory, is that God has given us into the hands of Jesus and by his redemptive love, we are presented back to the Father of Jesus in safety and solidarity. John presents Jesus as the Jewish Option amidst various and opposing factions of the Jewish people outside Jerusalem. Jesus has attracted a "flock" and he is presented as the caretaker and guide for this group. Here too there was opposition and controversy. What we are hearing in this small section is the strong affirmation of who we are to Jesus and we are included through his hands in to his fold.

Not very long ago I had surgery. I was going to be under general anesthetic. I was just reclining on this padded portable table preparatory to getting wheeled into the surgery room. A perfect picture of a person putting his life into the hands of the doctors. The nurses were kind, telling me this and that and I found it easy to put my present-life condition into their hands, because I was still awake, and of course, in complete control. Then it really got serious when the nurse told me she was now putting into the intravenous line, some solution which would "take the edge off". Well I wasn't aware of any "edge" until she mentioned it. I was going under and into the surgical hands of somebody who had interviewed me, but I hadn't quizzed him much and investigated his background and all those others, whose hands would be touching me, cutting me, and digging around inside this very precious body of mine.

Trusting is a most sacred interaction. Here is a simple experiment: Invite someone to smell something which you have in your hand such as a glass or can of something. Raise it toward their nose and instinctively they will take it into their own hands even though your hand is still holding the container. They might be your spouse, your child, your best friend, and they still will find it hard to trust that you will not squirt them or mash them in the face, or offer them something terrible to smell.

Jesus is telling us that we belong to him. He offers us eternal life and that nobody can take us out of his hands! We are in the hands of his Eternal Father as well and no one can take us away from those hands. We do try to interview God and check out God's credentials of fidelity before allowing God to offer us something to smell or live. Control is our safeguard and our illusion. As consoling as these lines might be, the more comforting line is when he affirms, "I know them..."

So there I was on the portable "table of sacrifice" and I so wanted to put it all in God's hands by trusting the nurses and doctors and before I knew it, I was in my hospital room hours later hoping that I really had trusted that I was in God's hands. The doctor's hands were plenty skilled, the nurses were

so expert and I had not investigated their backgrounds or their academic qualifications. Did I trust them? Did I trust I was in God's hands? God knows. God knows me and so do I.

We trust the seeable - the known - with little fears, but trusting what we cannot see, know totally, well, that is too sacred to measure. If I were to go back tomorrow for a completely different surgery, with the same doctor in our same Creighton University Medical Center, hmmm, God knows me and to whatever degree I would trust the doctor, that would be sacred and still scary.

“The Good shepherd has risen, who laid down His life for His sheep and willingly died for His flock, Alleluia.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.