

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jul 28th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

There are so many good things which we would love to do and especially for others. The more those others are close to our hearts and so our actions would be a reflection of our own hearts, the more we cannot do them well. We do not love as deeply as we feel love. Real love is a revelational experience of our personal richness and at the same times our poverty.

God alone does it perfectly in revealing divine love through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The reception of that love is how we love God and how we fulfill the First Commandment. The reception of the Eucharist is how we allow Jesus to touch us lovingly. What God desires eternally to offer us is perfect in expression of God's interior or nature. God chooses many ways to extend love to us and our reception of the Word and the Eucharist is as perfect a response as we can do as humans. This week we can prepare for the reception of the Word and the Word Made Flesh, by practicing receptivity of the little and larger surprises, interruptions, mistakes, and joys all as ways for us to be more open to what God is up to when we gather together.

REFLECTION

Last week's First Reading was the story of three appearing to Abraham and eventually promising to Sarah that she, in her advanced age, would have a son. The story continues in today's First Reading. After eating and visiting, Abraham accompanies them toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Two of the three well-fed visitors go ahead of Abraham who remains with the Third, Who turns out to be the Lord. God has been wondering whether Abraham should be told what God has in mind about the sinful condition of these two great, but terrible cities.

What we hear in these verses today is a little bit of bargaining between the two. God has decided to wipe out all the sinful citizens, even though not all have sinned. At that time of the history of Israel, there was such a sense of national identity and unity, that if one person sinned, then the whole people had sinned. This does change even in the Hebrew scriptures. Cf Jeremiah 5, 1

Abraham's requests for mercy upon the people become a revelation of God's mercy. For the sake of the possibility that there were "ten" righteous men, God walks away from divine wrath and Abraham returns home to begin his being the Father of Faith and of many nations. Would that we could successfully bargain with God and still be people of faith. It is very important to remember that in

Genesis, God is being revealed slowly and still mysteriously. Many questions remained in the minds and hearts of the people of God about just Who God is and how do we relate with this being called, “The Lord”. Would we say that Abraham won God over by verbal seduction? Would we say that God is moved by our human condition or is God moving toward the human condition from within Divine eternal love?

Our Gospel text centers our reflection upon three letters, “A”, “S”, “K”: Asking, Seeking, and Knocking. The first asking is done by the apostles who would like Jesus to teach them to pray as John was teaching his followers. So Jesus gives them a five-part prayer in which there is imbedded some forms of asking. They and we are taught to acknowledge the holiness of God and then request something called “daily bread”. Now what do you believe he meant by that? Then we are to ask for our being forgiving and then freedom from the “final test” which, like any final exam, might make us worried.

Other than the opening recognition of God’s holiness, the whole prayer seems pretty centered on personal greed, self-centered peacefulness and life-long security. The remainder of our reading are some homey examples which Jesus uses to explain how we should keep asking, seeking, and knocking and we will eventually receive, find, and have doors of God and life opened.

The last verse is mysterious, yet so important to our understanding of this asking prayer. For all that we request, what we will receive, find, and have revealed to us is the result of the Holy Spirit’s working out our salvation history. What exactly are we going to receive? What will we find? What is inside the doors which will be opened to our knocking?

The spirit of parental love gives, shares, and offers to the children of their hearts, what they believe is for the best good of that child. Jesus refers to this near the end of the reading. The loving Spirit of the God Who is more than father, offers through our lives, not what we desire at any one time. Here’s the hard part. God created us, we believe that. The work of the Holy Spirit is to give us experiences of contingency. Oh, we don’t like that very much. The word literally means, “Holding on together”. We Ask, Seek, and Knock because we want things for ourselves and others. Often what we ask for is something that would make God a bit less necessary and ourselves a bit more independent. The real gift from God is the deepening awareness of our being creatures, from which fact, we want to deny, flee, and lock out.

When we do receive, or find, or have things opened up and clarified, the always-accompanying gift has to be that within those very received things, will be the embedded need for even more. This built-in

lack or longing is the real gift of the Holy Spirit which is always given. For this gift, most often, we would rather not Ask, Seek, or Knock.

We definitely love some aspects of our being creatures, but not all. This ever-present contingency is such a human feature. So for all the gratitude we can feel for God's gifts as our response, there is an invitation to trust God's parental love in what is not given, found, and or opened. The real asking in Christ's way of praying is to receive more giftedly and gratefully our human creatureliness.

“O bless the Lord, my soul, and never forget all his benefits.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.