

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Aug 2nd 2013

Today is the celebration of Blessed Peter Faber, SJ, one of the early Jesuits. Peter Faber was, in fact, the first of the “Friends” to be ordained. Blessed Peter Faber had a humble beginning as a shepherd on the mountains of Savoy in the Alps however lived his adult life in service to God. His roommates at the University of Paris are perhaps better known: St. Frances Xavier and then a few years later St Ignatius. These “Friends” studied together and supported each other in their exploration of life and finding God’s path for them. Peter Faber was blessed with a great memory and intellect. He served as an academic guide to Ignatius tutoring him in his study of Greek while Ignatius served as a spiritual guide to Peter. Peter became not only the first priest among them but also a master of the Spiritual Exercises. As was true for many of the early Jesuits, he traveled far to spread the Gospel and serve those most in need sharing the Exercises. Being a “prophet” in a foreign land is a familiar role for those in the Society of Jesus, both in the past and now.

It is ironic that on this day of the Feast of Blessed Peter Faber, the first full day of the international conference of the National Steering Committee on Justice in Jesuit Higher Education begins here at Creighton University. As presented in the conference material, it will focus on response to Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach’s address at Santa Clara in 2000 that challenged American Jesuit Higher Education to its role in service of faith and promotion of justice. Its title, *On fire at the Frontiers*, recalls the challenges of early Jesuits such as Blessed Peter Faber in spreading the word of God. The conference materials further elaborates that the aim of the conference is to establish a fuller and more humane conversation among all of the people who encounter one another at any point along any frontier. “The conference thus focuses specifically on contact points where all the dimensions of our work in higher education engage with someone, something, or someplace else. Whether the specific borderlands are geographical, cultural, environmental, historical, spiritual, religious, or social, we meet others where we and they are.” The irony for me relates to today’s gospel about not being able to be seen as credible where we are known. Rather as we reach to those frontiers, perhaps we can be influential in transformation than in our own backyard.

The gentle spirit and approach of Faber resulted in many finding God in a new way leading many in the Spiritual Exercises in their path to renewal. We, too, have many opportunities to influence others by both our words and actions. As part of a Jesuit university, I feel blessed to have choices to participate in such activities. To be able to stumble along the path with other pilgrims and, at times, be able to show the way. To share in the conversations that will make a difference for our future of Ignatian tradition of faith and justice. How many times, we have heard the expression about not being an expert to those who are most familiar with us. There is comfort in knowing that Jesus faced the same challenge and continued to reach out to others. We can do no less. . . .

Nancy Shirley