

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 18th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

Those who are in the know about such things, tell us that the human brain can think of one thing per second and then change channels that quickly. Just try to think about that for more than a second. Apparently we are constantly passing images along from our senses through our minds quite rapidly.

On occasion while celebrating a parish liturgy, I would like to stop the ritual prayers and just quietly ask the folks about what they are thinking or were thinking before I asked. I know they would laugh at me and then at themselves. Our minds, like our hearts are wanderers. I would imagine that the Apostles at the Last Supper were day-dreaming, perhaps wondering when this celebration was going to get over.

This week we could do well to pray with our distractions, our day-dreams, our wanderings. I know that some believe that they could pray, or should be able to pray without distractions. This would be a gift that God does not give many of us. This week as we prepare to experiences driftings during the weekend liturgy, we could try praying about the real nature of these mental realities. We could pray with what is true about them, what are we wanting, missing, regretting. Prayer begins with the truth of our hearts and distractions might be part of that truth. There might be real grace for us to pray with our patterns of prayer-wanderings.

REFLECTION

Down-in-the-mud Jeremiah has been at it again. There is a war going on and Jerusalem is surrounded with the army of Babylon. Jeremiah, in our First Reading, is experiencing the consequences of the burning-word of God within him.

He has been telling everybody to surrender and all will go well. This does sound strange to the soldiers and officials who complain to King Zedekiah who turns Jeremiah over to them. They put him out of commission temporarily as a prophet by dropping him into a dried-up well. Upon hearing this, an official of the court relates to the king that the Prophet will die therein. So the king relents and has Jeremiah raised and brought to him for a chat. We do not hear this conversation in today's reading, but I can tell you now that Jeremiah tells the king exactly what he has been saying in the city. Surrendering to the enemy will result, not in death, but life to the king, his family, and the city of Jerusalem. The king, well you read the rest of the story yourselves.

The Gospel is the conclusion to the chapter from which we have been listening these past few weekends. We have heard about the dangers of greed and about the followers of Jesus who must stay awake, attentive, and responsive as servants of the serving-Lord. These verses have been dramatic and hard to hear. Well, get set for the dramatic climax.

Jesus, again speaking to his disciples with the crowd hanging around, tells them that he, who proclaimed the blessedness of the peacemaker, has come “not to establish peace on earth.” “Division” is his blazing, heart-driven desire. He refers to this as a “baptism” with which he wishes to immerse the earth.

Our reading concludes with examples of family unity which will be split. This does not sound very appealing and who would want to follow such a prophet as Jesus. As with Jeremiah, Jesus is calling for a decision to surrender which might —no will— cause separation even within loving families.

I know of a family whose teenage member has declared that he is an atheist. Atheism is a God-given right. What is probably going on is that the mother and father are no longer to be considered gods and lords of this young person’s life. Jesus is asking for a little more thought and a decision to follow him and his ways. King Zedekiah had to make such a decision and the followers of Jesus have all had to do the same. The big decision is to move outside the city-walls of our senses and the security of those walls. Trusting, walking into the dark, going without knowing; these are tremendous violations of our present-day cultural ways.

Making decisions is the natural process for us humans; we make thousands of them each day. Our senses take in all kinds of information some of which we accept, some discard and much, we are not aware of. Our minds move us to a yes or no that is what the will does. We can eat peanut butter and our minds would still say that peanut butter ice cream is a big “no”. So our imaginations can present data to our minds for a choice as well. So a faith-decision to walk the ways of Jesus needs some information which Jesus gives his disciples, but some information has to be provided by our memory and imaginations. We are invited to live less dominated by greed and possessiveness. This is pretty clear, but we would have to imagine what that would mean and our memories would remind us of times when we had nothing. Faith is not easy. Deciding for the unknown future is not easy. Being an atheist is not easy either, because it also demands an act of faith.

It is a puzzlement why some believe in a God and others find that impossible and even humorous. The

faith to which Jesus invites his followers moves them past the impossible to lives which reflect the very person and mission of Jesus. It is much easier to follow from a safe distance and not have our lives changed by his relationship with us. The good things about this is that Jesus keeps attentively calling all outside the comfort-walls and into the life of real living, which in truth can be quite humorous. Marital love and commitment is a tremendous leap of faith. Love is a faith act, and faith is a love act. It is the commitment that costs and results in insecurity; and who desires that?

“With the Lord there is mercy; in Him is plentiful redemption.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.