

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Aug 25th 2013

PRE-PRAYERING

It takes a degree of humility to be surprised. Those who suffer from insecurity and fear are attracted to the familiar and arranged. Being surprised can make us appear, at least to ourselves, silly or awkward.

The relationship with Jesus leads us to the adventure of surprises. This surprise-life is called vocation, or the spiritual life. What does help this kind of living in trust, is allowing for the possibility of the unprepared-for to be prepared for us as a gift of love from God.

As we prepare to again be surprised by the love shared with us during the Eucharist, we can check out how available we are to receive the unplanned-for surprises of each day. Smiling at their reception is a sign we are moving closer and closer to allowing Jesus to call us closer to him and his kingdom.

REFLECTION

I was seated next to a young woman on a flight recently who was heading with her family for a vacation in San Francisco, California. I remarked about what a tremendous city San Francisco is. She replied in a shy and timorous voice, almost whispering, that she was excited, but afraid of “those Liberals out there”. I nearly swallowed my Boarding Pass. I refrained from telling her I was one of those Jesuits, lest she ask to be resealed.

The readings today are about who belong and who do not. The readings have poignancy for these religious and national times.

We hear from the last chapter of the Prophet Isaiah in our First Reading; there were “Mystery Religions” arising after the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. They were attempting to be separate, special and closer to God than the Jews of the Covenant. The prophet speaks the word from God who knows who and what they are. The Word of God continues by announcing an expansion program of God’s people.

From the remnant, the survivors of the exile, God will send messengers to announce to the “foreigners” that they too belong. These proclaimers will bring into God’s holy family “brothers and sisters”. The real kicker is that some of these, who once did not belong, will be anointed as religious leaders of the people. God’s embrace just got wider. As God recalled Israel from captivity to be a remnant and nucleus of the restored People of God, so there will be gathered-ones, who will see God’s glory and come to Jerusalem as clean offerings. This is very new wine to drink for many of the people of Jerusalem.

The Gospel pictures Jesus in a discussion about just who is on the inside and who will stand weeping and grinding their teeth. Let it be noted that in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is moving constantly up toward Jerusalem for his final presentation of his life. On the way he makes very important displays of his personality and mission. “Somebody” is always asking him a question almost as a set up for his display. So it is with our Gospel today.

“Will only a few people be saved?” The question continues to our day. We, here at Creighton University, are a Roman Catholic educational mission, and we welcome students from all religious traditions. There have been confrontations here between non-Catholic students and practicing Catholic students in which the Catholics are told they are going to hell, because they do not follow the teachings of Jesus strictly enough. Who are going to be saved? Various religious groups of our times hold fiercely to a belief that those who do not follow their ways are “infidels” and are not worthy of life. Liberals, Conservatives, various opposing political groups, all struggle to be in the in. It was this way within the Jewish nation as well. They were God’s people and all others were to be avoided as unclean, foreigners. Isaiah, in our First Reading, speaks directly to this issue and so does Jesus in the Gospel, but not with an easy “yes” or “no”.

Jesus presents himself as the “narrow gate” through which entrance is offered, not won, or achieved. The “not strong enough” are those who through their own weakness of faith cannot hear and accept Jesus and his ways of living the human life.

There will be those who will say that they ate and drank with the “master of the house”, who will in turn say simply, “I do not know where you are from.” Literally, there are some inside and others outside.

Jesus uses this image to highlight his basic teaching that “by their fruits you will know them.” Luke is presenting Jesus as offering the Jewish crowd what he has been offering his disciples. The “door”, the “gate”, the “way” is Jesus and not merely by eating with him, drinking with him, and listening to him,

will be enough. Those who are with him reflect that relationship of being in the in, by being in the out with Him. What we do in our outward actions will manifest our being in.

People will come from all directions and recline at table with the three founders of the Jewish faith while some will be excluded; because they did not live the faith as did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These, and their followers trusted God, but those who excluded themselves by not believing in Jesus, will remain excluded. The “first” who will be last are those who trusted the revelations of God first, but those who received God’s last revelation in Jesus will be first in the in.

We can define ourselves by who we are not. “We know who we are, because we are different from you. At least we are not like you.” If we follow the way of Jesus we define ourselves by his inclusion of us and our inclusion of others. Not by arguing about who will be saved and who will not, but by our living the fruitful life of belonging to God’s family, by God’s including choice will he know us.

I wonder what Liberals really look like in San Francisco these days.

“Go out to all the world and tell the good news.” Ps. 117

Larry Gillick, S.J.