

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 19th 2014

While we enjoyed tight family bonds, geography separated my cousins and me. My brothers, two sisters and I grew up in South Dakota and our cousins all lived on the East Coast. The divide was eliminated in summertime as my parents loaded the four of us into the station wagon with sandwiches and sleeping bags to make the drive across the country. The time cramped in the car was worth it as we spent three weeks at my aunt's simple summer cabin. The thirteen cousins would spend hours swimming in the lake, walking to the ice cream shop, playing board games during raining days and comparing Midwest/ East coast language nuances. I was closest to my cousin Mary (a popular name in my family) and I admired her sophisticated city perspective.

In John's gospel today we hear the powerful testament John the Baptist shares about his cousin Jesus. John proclaims Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." God had told John the Baptist of the sign "on whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."

As I pray with today's Gospel I am moved by John the Baptist's certainty and clarity of faith.

However, I was also puzzled by his saying that he did not know Jesus. But then I was transported back to my idyllic times at the lake cabin. John's relationship with Jesus was first as fellow family member which is an important reminder of the humanity of Jesus. When the Holy Spirit descended from heaven, John's eyes were opened to seeing Jesus not just as a companion but as the savior our messiah.

The Gospel today also helps me learn an important lesson from John the Baptist about how we can continually be surprised by someone we believe we know. Many times I will trust a relationship to be on auto-pilot leading me to be blind to gifts of the other person. My cousin Mary and I grew apart and received occasional updates about one another through our mothers. Now in middle age I can appreciate how she gracefully managed many trials in her life and how she is now a vibrant, loving mother, friend and companion. I see Christ in her life and pray that I can know Jesus and the Holy Spirit through those I encounter.

John's revelation helps me be more open to the presence of Jesus in every moment of my life. Like Paul in today's second reading we are all called to be holy. "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will."

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