

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jan 24th 2014

In today's theologically dense first reading, Jesus is referred to as a High Priest and Savior; one who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens". In these words and images, where Jesus "has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven" he seems so far away, so far removed from our lives and our daily concerns. How can he possibly care about us or be involved in our world?

What a contrast to the Gospel. Here Jesus is pursued by people from many regions - people coming to him with all kinds of illness, disease and uncleanness. Men, women and children who are outcasts, sinners, and possessed by demons are all pushing towards him, wanting to touch him, wanting healing. Jesus is also portrayed as vulnerable in this passage – wanting his disciples to have a boat ready so he can go out in the water – not because he is repulsed by their diseases and demons, but so he would not be crushed by the crowd. Jesus is very much human, one of us, moved with compassion to want to heal those who are suffering, but also aware of his limitations.

In both passages, Jesus is an intercessor, a mediator. In the first, we are reminded that he is an intercessor for us with our Creator God, the Holy One who is beyond anything we can imagine. Because he raised Jesus from the dead, we know that God's grace and action is more potent than the most destructive evil we humans can dream up and inflict upon each other. In this way, God is so very, very far from us.

In the Gospel, Jesus mediates God's compassion, God's desire that all may have life and have it in fullness. In Jesus we know that God cares for each of us and all of us; that God is closer to us than our own breath; able to restore health and life with a touch.

The only fitting response we can make is articulated well in the Psalm for the day, "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will." We are filled with awe and wonder at this marvelous world, and we respond with humility and service. Today we remember Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church; may we live today inspired by his humility and service to our world.

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