

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jun 26th 2015

Today's readings cause me to reflect upon how we show trust in our relationships. Trust is in short supply in modern life. We have replaced trust with security systems and an atmosphere of constant vigilance, which saps our energies from more productive endeavors. When trust is low, we erect more barriers around us. Ironically, pursuing security in this way often causes us to lose our peace; even love becomes a challenge.

Trust can also be eroded in our relationship with God. All of us have felt abandoned or lost at some time. None of us have immunity from hurt and disappointment. Some keep wandering (and wondering) until they find their way again, keeping an openness to the possibility that God is working even through the hurts. Sometimes trust even grows from that journey, particularly as we experience unexpected goodness. But some decide to stop, erect barriers, and to draw their sustenance from what they think they can secure. They can only sense the hurt, and they do not want to go back there again. But not going back may also block the way forward.

All of us sometimes adopt the barrier approach, particularly with difficult relationships. And sometimes we get into a difficult patch in our spiritual life, which may cause us to wall ourselves off from the Church. In my own experience, that usually does not last long. I don't have that much confidence in my own barriers! Moreover, those barriers are likely more effective at keeping out the healing medicine we need, rather than giving genuine protection.

But I will readily admit that I sometimes behave like Abraham, laughing inside and wondering how this relationship with God will really turn out after all. If we read the first text carefully, Abraham may actually provide a useful path forward when we feel crosswise in our spiritual life. Note that along with his doubts and uncertainties, he also prostrated himself, choosing to honor God with his behavior. Outward behavior often leads our interior disposition, which is sometimes the last guest to arrive at the party. This is required and expected of us in many social contexts, when we must behave better than we feel. It should not surprise us that sometimes we need to do this in our relationship with God. Of course, He is always aware of our interior disposition; we are not fooling Him. But He is also aware that we are trying to do right, and perhaps grace comes to us as we take even small steps in the right direction.

The leper in today's gospel did something similar: After approaching Jesus, the leper first "did him homage" – presumably following customary behavior to show honor within his culture. The leper then said something astonishing: "Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean." He obviously wanted to be extracted from the ostracism and pain associated with leprosy, but he seems to leave this outcome to the Lord's discretion. He does not seek to impose his will upon Jesus, but instead he seems to affirm Jesus' authority and to honor His will above his own.

I find myself in awe of the leper's trust in Jesus. When things don't go well for me, I tend to ruminate and stew in my own hurts and needs. My interior motivation is not oriented toward doing homage, but instead to ask God why he has put me in such a state! And of course, I usually have a prescription to offer as well! But I am not the Great Physician. My prescription might even make me worse off. Following the leper's example would be an improvement, indeed.

Let us pray for this kind of trust. Thanks be to God.

Edward Morse-Creighton University Law School