

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Apr 23rd 2016

Our readings today bring us reminders of what a Christian life looks like in daily life.

Our first reading from Acts recounts the events of Paul and Barnabas' efforts to share the "word of the Lord" with the Jews and Gentiles. The two encountered setbacks and received resistance from the Jews and positive feedback from the Gentiles. Even though the Jews essentially kick them out of the area, we are told, "the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit."

What?! Did I read that right? They were joyful, despite these big setbacks, these failed attempts at evangelization?! I admit I had to reread the passage a few times and reflect on this contradiction. It is hard enough for us to accept suffering, let alone rejoice amidst rejection and persecution. And yet, isn't that the dynamic of being a Christian, of experiencing the joys, challenges and struggles of living the Paschal Mystery, of following the crucified and resurrected Christ? God doesn't promise us smooth, easy and comforting pathways, right? I sure do find myself wishing and hoping for an easier or smoother pathway at times, I admit. The lasting joy is really in that profound lesson that we often suffer for living a Christian life and proclaiming the message of life and love in our words and actions. Paul and Barnabas remind us that suffering is not easy and that it's not the end of the story, the final note. Through suffering and death, we come to new life, abundant life in Christ. And, Paul and Barnabas teach us that when our words and actions for Christ are met with resistance, heartache or violence, we are to respond with the Gospel message of peace, hope and joy. These are all parts of the Christian life!

In our Gospel reading from John today, we are reminded that knowing God, through Jesus, is an invitation of ours. God is not a distant being, but one who is accessible and invites us to an intimate relationship, through his son. Isn't it evident when a person knows God and knows Jesus intimately? They exude a sort of depth, peace, and compassion that one who lacks that intimacy doesn't demonstrate. Knowing God, knowing Jesus, or knowing anyone, really, doesn't mean there's simply an intellectual understanding, but also a deep, personal experience of the presence of the person.

I believe it's a little bit like how I know my daughter, who is two and a half years old. I can honestly say that I know her well from spending time with her, listening to her, interacting with her, learning how she operates, etc. As her mother, I know when something's not right; I know with pretty good accuracy her preferences, too. And, that is not the same as knowing, on an intellectual level, the developmental milestones of a toddler from reading parenting books and articles.

God and Jesus want that same intimacy for us – to know them well and deeply, such as through heartfelt conversation and prayer, receiving the sacraments, by listening. Let us accept that invitation for intimacy, each day, with more depth and enthusiasm. That will strengthen our resolve to be joyful and filled with the Spirit despite the persecution and hardships of daily life in our Christian faith.

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