

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jan 9th 2017

We pray with a great time-shift in today's Gospel. Thirty years have passed since last-Sunday's Gospel wherein the Magi were visiting the Holy Family. We pray for our personal coming to maturity; with us, it has taken longer than a week. We can pray also for an increase in our desire to pray "with" and less to pray "for".

Jesus heard the ordaining words of his being the "beloved" and we long to hear those words from around us and within us. Who we listen to does determine what we hear. We pray to hear, to listen and to believe the message and the Messenger. He walks us prayerfully through his very public life of love.

We hear of a certain "Servant" in the First Reading of our liturgy. Isaiah, within the fifteen chapters forty through fifty-five, compiles the Book of Consolation. This prophet writes often of Israel as a "servant". More definitely, Isaiah, within these chapters, proclaims four special Servant Songs describing a particular person. We hear the First Song in which, in the words of the Lord, he calls to and points out this one "servant".

This person has a specific mission which involves his going beyond the boundaries of Israel, bringing a "light". This "light" will bring "justice" to the earth as well as recovery of sight and freedom for those in darkness and prison. This "Servant" will be gentle and not like other prophets who work themselves up into a feverish frenzy resulting in shouting and convulsions. He will be gentle of speech and action. He will be upheld by the Lord and loved explicitly so as to bring "justice" between God and God's creation.

While it is a text announcing a special person for that time of hope, it has a taste of the characteristics of the coming Messiah. The Spirit of God will be upon and within him and his identity will be known by the people of Israel through his actions.

The Gospel is one more "Annunciation" scene. As with Gabriel's announcing to Mary that she would give birth to a son who will be born of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is announced as the "beloved son" by the same Spirit. John has baptized the crowd and Jesus fulfills his ritual tradition. Then, while praying, there is a new form of baptism specifying him as the "beloved servant". In a sense, it is more of a "confirmation" or even more, an "ordination". This is not the moment when Jesus takes upon himself a "Divine Nature", but an announcement of his coming of age in our salvational history. By the overshadowing by the Spirit he became incarnate. By the "over-hovering" of the same Spirit he becomes incorporated, that is embracing himself as "servant-Messiah" of God and for all God's people. The same Spirit "incarnates" and "Incorporates" that family in Luke's account of Pentecost in The Acts of the Apostles.

With our being baptized, we enter this same coming of age, this same being part of Jesus' salvific embrace of God's mission of returning creation to its proper state of praise and order. The work of the Spirit is bringing about flesh and family. The Spirit overshadowed and conceived a fleshly presence and a family of faith. We are likewise inspirited to take flesh anew and our mission of extending God's family in Christ.

We have been celebrating these past weeks, the Word becoming flesh. Mary's flesh was more than it

seemed; her body was more than others knew. In time her cousin, the shepherds; the Magi came to reverence that which was different from what it had seemed to be. That Word Made Flesh was transformed too, from being what it seemed to be seen for what he was, the “Beloved Son”.

Ah, here’s the rub. My flesh and your flesh have been immersed in the baptismal experience of Jesus. His body and person were united by God to unite us within ourselves and incorporate us with and for each other. It is a “rub” because, like Jesus, we are baptized, confirmed and all are ordained to go public. Jesus had to leave his praying alone, leave the riverbank, leave the association with John and begin his walk towards Jerusalem. We in our turn must leave our privacy our pews, our comfort zone, our well-planned, surpriseless ways. The “rub” is that our flesh, our persons, our presences are much more than they seem. We are so close to ourselves though, that what “seems” is deceptive. As Jesus heard his new name, he moved from "seems" to "is", as did Mary of Nazareth. The “rub” is that we have to rub against the same spirits of this world which confronted Jesus from shortly after his “baptism” to shortly before he baptized the earth with his blood.

Our being Baptized and Confirmed dedicates us into the “Listeningness” of Jesus. As he listened to the mysterious God and to the bewildering voices of humanity within and around Him, by these same sacraments we plunge into the waters of “Discernment”. To be guided by the spirit does not mean our being subtracted from the attractive voices which sure can sound “divine”. Our ears were blest at our baptisms to begin this process of learning what God sounds like and what our egos, our flesh, and our worldliness too, sound like. Jesus learned to listen to it all with receptivity and discretion. We will spend these next weeks of the Liturgical Year listening so that we might hear, and hearing, we might live what we come to believe.

“This is he of whom John said, 'I have seen and have given witness that this is the Son of God.’” Jn. 1,
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