

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jul 31st 2017**

Like the Israelites, I am easily distracted by shiny things. When they got bored after Moses went up on the mountain to talk with God, the Israelites decided they needed a new god. The God Moses had didn't seem to be around, so they melted their jewelry and made a sparkling, golden calf. Around it, they danced and worshiped.

My shiny gods may be less visible, but I do find myself sometimes dancing around the gods of success. Even in retirement, I wonder how I look or come across. I kneel at the god of praise. I light a small candle at the god of perfection (and remind my husband where he falls short).

All of us get sidetracked in our lives when we perhaps we aren't exactly sure where God is. We've gotten too busy to spend time in prayer and our distractions mount. The "shiny things," which differ for all of us, are sometimes so much easier to see.

Today at Creighton University and at Jesuit schools, parishes and institutions around the world, we celebrate St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Like the rest of us, Ignatius was distracted on the path to sainthood by the sense of his own sinfulness and his doubts God could really forgive him. It took him a while to understand that God loves each of us beyond measure and that we are happiest when we are in tune with our Creator.

Ignatius put our golden calves in the context of our lives in his brilliant compilation of prayer experiences, the Spiritual Exercises. Gold jewelry and dancing are not bad things in themselves, he might say, but what place do they have in our lives? Money is not an evil, he believed, but we should not center our lives on it. Neither poverty nor riches are a greater good; health or illness. The central question is which one will help us find intimacy with God?

How can we see that the shiny things in each of our lives interfere with us clearly seeing the God whose heart is filled with love – a God who holds us in an unbounded embrace? More importantly, Ignatius believed that we will be happiest as human beings if we put aside anything that distracts us from God. So, it won't matter if we are a success or failure – just that God is at the center of our lives, not success. We will be not only be more aware of God as an active part of our lives, we will be at peace.

In today's gospel, Jesus tells us the Kingdom of Heaven is like a tiny mustard seed that becomes the largest of plants, stretching its branches to hold the nests of birds. With his parable, Jesus consoles us, that the reign of God is sometimes hard to see in our lives. It grows without our being able to see it - perhaps without our even believing it possible. Sometimes the "smallest of seeds" produces startling results.

The littlest openings in our hearts can change our relationship with someone else. If we make a gesture of kindness to someone who annoys, we might find it can plant the tiniest seed of compassion within us. If we allow ourselves to see humanity in the person who annoys or infuriates us (in our family, in the news) it can be the beginning of a new capacity for love within us. Sometime the smallest effort to stop the flood of our instinctive negative reactions and thoughts will grow into a transformative outlook on life.

Today we can ask God to open our hearts enough to let the smallest seed of his love grow and spread in us so that we can share it with those around us.

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