

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Apr 29th 2013

Today's first reading from Acts opens with Paul and Barnabas fleeing from Iconium because the people are about to attack them with stones. In the next paragraph we see the two in Lystra, where the townspeople think they are gods. They call Paul "Zeus," and wait with garlands and fatted oxen to venerate him. Paul rips his garments, and rushes into the crowd wildly asking "Why are you doing this?" trying to explain that he is just a human as they are.

I've have often found myself standing with the people of Lystra, holding a garland and waiting for a god to come by. When I am not in the mood to look, it can be hard to find my own, real, loving God who waits in the center of my regular days.

All of us wish life was a little less complicated and if we see something new, popular, shiny, more sparkly or magic, we might want to make it the new center of our lives. Do we make a god of our own self-image, our jobs, clothes, homes or education? Things that are basically good – like health, fitness, wealth, and family – can become our own little gods. In a self-satisfied world focused on me, I might not notice the poor and marginalized.

Yes we might make gods out of honors and riches, but we can also make gods out of issues in our lives – like a long-term argument where we are certain we have been wronged. We carry our grudges like a shield and refuse to consider the healing that is necessary. It has become our little god that we incorporate into our lives and carry proudly.

Even in a marriage, we can gather all of the wrongs our spouse has done to us, and create our own little god, and feature myself as the wounded spouse who shares my pain with friends and relatives and but does nothing to make it better. "It just can't change."

In today's gospel, Jesus offers advice to us that is fairly simple. "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."

Whoever loves me will keep my word: To love God and love our neighbors. That's not always easy to do or easy to remember to do when we are tired and stressed. But if we can love Jesus as he asks, it

means that the Father and Jesus will “make a dwelling” with us. They will dwell in each of us, live at such a deep level that they become a part of who we are and guide us to the peace we each long for. That is when we can let our arms down and drop the immense weight of the false gods we have been carrying, and fall instead into the warm embrace of the God who loves us endlessly.

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