

Gospel Sight

In today's gospel we are presented with a familiar sight—people vying with one another over who is the most important. It's a hard temptation to resist—the hunger for prestige, but the sharpness of our hunger is in inverse proportion to how important we already feel inside. We hunger for the praise of others to fill a vacuum within our own souls, a gnawing feeling that we are not so important, that we don't really count. We can feel at times like the person in the first reading—beset by sufferings and hardships on every side, we feel bereft and forsaken. We can feel at times like a neglected child. And so like a neglected child we cry out for more attention.

But when we indulge in such comparisons we end up overlooking all that we share in common. Since it does not serve to distinguish us, we dismiss what we share in common as not worth mentioning—until we lose it. Like our health or our job, or even someone we love. They can get on our nerves, they can drive us crazy, but we should never let that overlook their value to us, and ours to them.

I suspect we are tempted to compete against others less to impress them than to reassure ourselves. Or we want to impress them precisely so as to reassure ourselves that we do count, that we do matter. But Jesus shows us another way. If we wish to be the best, he says, then channel that ambition into serving your neighbor. If your faith in yourself is weak then reach out to others who are weak like you, whose weakness you can understand only too well, whose pain you can console because you know what it is like. If you feel sometimes like a neglected little child, then reach out to the neglected children in your midst you, children big and small, young and old. . Lavish upon them the love and attention you so long for and you will begin to feel more lovable yourself.

In today's Gospel Jesus responds to his disciples' rivalry by stooping down and hugging a child. What child? The Gospel writer did not say anything about there being children around. And whose child was it? Some stray child off the street? Or was it one of the apostles' children milling around at their feet as they talked? Wait—did the apostles have kids? I have never heard anyone even wonder about such a thing. If Peter's mother in law had not gotten sick, we would not have even known any of them were married.

Jesus tells these competitive apostles that the greatest among them is the one who can pay attention to this rug rat under their feet, that even the teller of the tale has not thought to mention

before now. So too God is not hard to find because he is so high in the sky or so far away, God is hard to find because he is so close, so easy to take for granted. If God is everywhere all the time, like the air we breathe how can he get our attention? He is like white noise.

Jesus warns us that we cannot truly love God without loving our neighbor. He is not simply talking about not being a hypocrite. He is also talking about how love gives us eyes to see what we would otherwise overlook, ears that can hear what we would otherwise ignore. Love of neighbor teaches us how to see God, hear God, feel God. Through service to others we come to see how God is already caring for us. May we be blessed with such sight.