

Looking and listening

Today we hear once more the story of Jesus= return home, and the rejection he found there. Why was it that those who had lived with him since he was a child, those whom one would think would know him best, why were they the very ones who had no time for him, who could place no faith in his words or his works?

According to our story their unbelief was due precisely *to* his being so familiar to them. AIs this not the carpenter=s son?@ Who does this guy think he is? Where does he come off acting the prophet? Come on! He=s one of us.

What are Jesus= friends and neighbors saying? He=s from around here, so he can=t be from God? What are they saying? That if he were truly from God, he would *not* be like them? That if he were truly from God he wouldn=t be some *ordinary* guy, but someone *extraordinary*? But the paradox is that Jesus was sent from God precisely to be one of us. The paradox is that it is his being just like us, a common, ordinary guy, that makes him so extraordinary; that makes him a savior for ordinary people like us. For in being from God and yet being like us, he wakes us up to just who we really are, and just where we really come from.

This is part of the Good News that Jesus preachedB that God is to be found in the ordinary and the everyday. So for God=s sake, and your own, don=t take your life for granted. You only have one life to live, don=t live it under a bushel basket. And don=t take others for granted, either. Loving God and loving neighbor ought to be two sides of the same life. For we are all sons of God, we are all daughters of the Father. God=s kingdom is already beginning, right here, before your eyes, under your nose. You with eyes to see, look. You with ears to hear, listen. Pay attention to what is all around you.

Its not a bad definition of prayer--using our eyes to look for God=s hand in all that is going on around us, using our ears to catch the familiar tone of God=s voice in what people are saying around us, to us in what we are saying to them.

Note God=s complaint against his people in today=s first reading from Ezekiel: AThey and their fathers have revolted against me to this very day. They are hard of face and obstinate of heart.@ What can soften our countenance? What can open our hearts? Let me suggest: gratitude. But to be grateful we have to notice that we have things to be grateful for. Jesus calls upon us to

be grateful to God for the most common, the most everyday things of our lives. He calls us to see the face of God, not merely in the great saints, it's easy to be impressed by impressive people, but to see the face of God even in the least of one=s neighbors--even in the face looking back at us in the mirror. That takes practice. That is a itself a grace to be grateful for.

After all, we can all resonate with Paul=s complaint of a thorn in the flesh. We all have our faults, bad habits we can=t shake. We all suffer in one way or another. Sometimes its our own fault, other times not. So if we ignore what *is* good in our lives, if we take the good we do have and do for granted, if we focus our attention only upon the thorns, picking at our scabs until they bleed again, we only end up compounding our sorrow and spreading our pain to those around us. To be channels of God=s grace we must believe that despite our faults, even through our sufferings, that we ourselves are already blessed; our lives already filled with grace as Mary=s life was full of grace though she was but the wife and mother of ordinary carpenters.. If we are to live with grace we must appreciate how we have been graced ourselves. As Bing Crosby preached last week, we can be better than we are, but only if we understand ourselves to already be good, even if not the best. In fact to think we are the best would mean that we can't be any better. To witness to Christ we must indeed have faith not in some impressive and extraordinary wonder-worker, someone easy to believe in, but faith in someone like ourselvesBJesus, son of God, but also son of a carpenter, and brother to us all.

So may we have eyes that can see and ears that can hear the wonders working all around us, noses that can smell the fragrance of sanctity in the most mundane, tongues that can taste and savor all we experience and skin that can feel the grace shining down from on high.