

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

Is 53:10-11

Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

Heb 4:14-16

Mk 10:35-45

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Can you believe it? These guys--*Apostles of the Church!*--arguing like little kids over who is the greatest, over who gets to sit closest to Jesus! We never do that, do we?

Recently I was preparing two prison inmates for baptism. They are tough street guys with the words 'Love' and 'Hate' tattooed on their knuckles and their girlfriends' names tattooed on their necks, but actually they are like little boys inside. When I gave one a prayer booklet to help him memorize the commandments, the other one complained, "Aw, you gave him one but not me." He was smiling as though he realized how childish this sounded, but on some level he meant it.

We never completely grow out of our need to be special. Today's Gospel brings that point home. The opening scene has James and John--the "Sons of Thunder"--saying to Jesus, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." Instead of Jesus saying, "Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?" he gives them more rope doesn't he? "What do you want me to do for you?" he answers. This brings out what might be a key question raised in the Scriptures we hear today.

What do you pray for?

Or even more pointedly, how do you relate to Jesus?

Are you one of those people who are inclined to say general prayers, such as "Lord, please bring peace to the world"? Or perhaps more personally, "Give me peace in my heart"? At least this way of praying doesn't presume to tell God exactly what to do as though he is our puppet.

On the other hand, you may be the type to pray very specifically, for example, "Dear Lord, I want you to send me a boyfriend, and he needs to be rich and handsome...oh and I want you to bring him into my life before Christmas because there is an office party I don't want to attend alone." Can you imagine all the different styles of prayer that reach God's ears each day?

General prayers are good. Certainly peace in the world is a good thing to pray for. However, a *little* specificity can help us and God to be real when we pray. Otherwise we hide our deepest needs and cop out by the idea that God already knows what I need, so why pray. But do *I* know what I need? I am suggesting that far from being annoyed at James and John, Jesus may have been glad they were so outrageous. They at least risked putting out in the open what their desire for a special friendship with Jesus would look like to them. And apparently loud enough that the other apostles heard them! Jesus could then be as real with them back, "You don't know what you are asking" (*you idiots*).

The main point I want to offer from this Gospel is that we need to be as real in our prayers as in our human relationships or there is no real intimacy. The rest of the apostles could bitch and moan at James' and John's pushiness, but so what? Who wants a

love relationship that keeps adding the disclaimer, “oh, but only if you want.” We want someone we love to say, “I want you.” I bet Jesus got a secret kick out of the desire of these two brothers’ (and apparently their mother!) that they be his best buddies in the Kingdom. You’ve got to imagine Jesus’ expression when James and John said this: a smirk? A roll of the eyes? A groan because they still didn’t get what the Kingdom was? A laugh or a frown? Real prayer is interactive. Both parties--oneself and the Lord--need to be able to be real. Can God be real with you and me, or do we keep God in a box by pandering to him?

I don’t believe God likes it when we try to shmooze him, try to manipulate him as though he doesn’t know what our secret and unmentioned desires are. He loves directness, it seems. That’s because when we risk being so, he can be so. Is this why we don’t? No wonder prayer is boring!

Do you ever say in your prayer something like: “You don’t care about me Lord... You don’t really give a damn”?

Do you ever let yourself be real enough to be angry at God? Or bored? Or sad? Petulant? Horny? Or do you--like I do often--make nice in prayer? If so, how can the Lord be his real self with me and you? Have you ever let him see you naked? At least emotionally naked?

A LIVING relationship is what we want. Surely it is what God wants. In the second reading we are told that we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, similarly tested in every way like us. Do we really believe this? If we do, we can say to him when ANYTHING is going on with us, “Jeshua, so *this* is what you went through too?” It’ll get you closer rather than further apart if you do so. Try this tonight and see what happens. The worst you could hear is, “You little pipsqueak, you grain of sand on the beach, who do you think you are?...but I love your audacity, your chutzpah, your raw feelings, yes, your foolish crazy outrageous desire to have a relationship with me, the Lord of the Universe...c’mere.”

Teresa of Avila said,

“Prayer is not just spending time with God. It is partly that--but if it ends there, it is fruitless.

No, prayer is dynamic. Authentic prayer changes us--unmasks us--strips us--indicates

where growth is needed. Authentic prayer never leads to complacency, but needles us

--makes us uneasy at times. It leads us to true knowledge, to true humility.”

So dear friends and apostles of Jesus Christ, don’t censor your prayer. As the reading from the prophet Isaiah invites, if you give your life as an offering for sin--your REAL LIFE--your daily life, WHATEVER you are going through - the will of the Lord will be accomplished in you.

Even if you sound like a needy child, like a fool for Christ before you die, let your real self come before the Lord

Aw, you gave him one but not me...

The living Lord Jesus will love you for it.