

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

Zeph 2:3; 3:12-13

Psalm

I Cor 1:26-31

Matt 5:1-12a

### The Sights and Sounds of the Kingdom of Heaven

Daniel J. McLaughlin, O.S.A.

At Monsignor Bonner High School, in the sophomore New Testament Theology class, the following question was put to Father McLaughlin:

In theology class one day, Frank asked Father McLaughlin the following question: “Father, Jesus said, ‘...you will do even greater things than I have done.’” The teacher replied, “Yes, Frank, Jesus did say that we would do greater things than He did.” Frank continued: “well then, that means we are greater than Jesus!” Father replied, “I do not think that is what he meant.” The answer by Father was not satisfactory and Frank asked it several more times. Father tried as best as he could but no answer satisfied Frank. The rest of the class became more interested in the question since it looked as if Father could not answer the question and a classroom of boys are always glad if they can corner a teacher. Finally, the tension was broken when Father said, “Frank, what Jesus meant is this: ‘what you have heard in the Bible is just the beginning, just WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE WHAT I WILL DO THROUGH YOU.’ ” At that moment, another student named Jim, cried out, “WOW!” His face was aglow and his eyes were bright with excitement for he had just felt the power of the Holy Spirit in the words of the teacher. Many other students were touched the Spirit and there was great excitement in the room for they all knew that something special had just happened. Father had felt nothing unusual in himself except that he tried to answer the question as if Jesus were answering it for Himself. For the rest of that class period and for the next three days that class of students asked Father McLaughlin to recount every experience he ever had or knew of that described the experience of Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

The story of the questioning students in the classroom of Father McLaughlin reminds us of the following problem of spiritual life: “why is that we do not more often recognize the sights and sounds of the kingdom of heaven in our everyday lives?” Two weeks ago in the Sunday reading, John the Baptist twice said: “I did not recognize Jesus (as the Messiah).” It was only when John heard the voice of the One who sent him say, “When you see the Spirit descend and rest on someone, it is he who is to baptize with the Holy Spirit.” Only by the light of God’s Spirit can we truly see. For it is only when one experiences a complete change of heart that the words of the gospel of last Sunday are understood: “On those who inhabit a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen.”

The message of the Sermon on the Mount requires that we allow God to become visible through the darkness of personal and universal suffering in the world. Jesus assures us that His Father will comfort those who: know poverty of spirit; who experience inconsolable sorrowing (mourning); who know of lowliness (a meekness of spirit that allows the discipline of God to govern one’s passions); who hunger and thirst for the holiness of God, so desperately, that it is

akin to one nearly at the point of death. Certainly, these sufferings are the images seen daily in the media and are a reminder of what more we must give-up in ourselves and in society in order to know God in our world. To do this we must experience a sacrifice of self. In the gospel reading last week we learn how the first disciples of Jesus readily abandoned their nets and followed Him. When we too give up our own self-constructed nets of safety, we allow God to reveal to us truths about reality. We are able to rejoice when contemplating the words of Isaiah, "So high as the sky is above the earth, so high are my ways says the Lord!" Reoriented...indeed ordained, we live our new life in God by showing mercy – as it was shown to us, becoming single-hearted – like Jesus, and accepting our role as God's peacemakers in an increasingly violent world.

In today's sermon, Jesus tells us that by becoming his sons and daughters we should expect to experience persecution. This is because the people of world may not be ready to see the world as God sees it and will reject everything guided by His vision. We recall the words of the psalmist who says, "Those who sow in tears will reap rejoicing" (Psalm 126). When we face rejection, we suffer with the Savior Himself who through the graciousness of His Father provides for all His children "a great reward in heaven."

Father McLaughlin and his students came down from the mountain that day after hearing Jesus talk to them in class. Later, Father found Jim, the one who cried out "WOW!" Father said to him, "Despite the excitement in class, some of your classmates are not sure they are ready to make a life changing commitment to our Lord Jesus, but you are." Jim smiled and said with conviction, "I know."

Along with John the Baptist and the crowds hearing the words of Jesus this day, let us not fail to recognize Him and One who sent him. Let us remember that our Lord describes our condition in this troubled world as 'blessed'.