

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 6, 2006 | The Peace Pulpit

Last Sunday, at the end of the Gospel reading, we were left with the disciples' question: "Who is this who has come into the world?" I hope we have reflected on that during this week. Who is this Jesus? Who? Of course, last week they had come to the conclusion "this is God." And they were in awe and trembling because, as Mark makes so clear, Jesus had power over the winds, over the water, over the chaos, just as in the beginning of the scriptures where it's revealed to us how God, the creator, brings order out of chaos, calms the waters, builds the earth.

Who is this? We're left with that awareness that Jesus is God.

Today, as we reflect on the scriptures and as we leave the church, I hope we will not be asking a question, but declaring with joy: what a friend we have in Jesus. What a friend we have in Jesus! Yes, he's God, but he's human. He has a human heart; a capacity for compassion; a profoundly generous spirit; one who quickly reaches out in love as a friend does. Today's scripture reminds us in the first lesson that God did not make death nor does God rejoice in the destruction of the living. God is love; God doesn't make death. Since God has created everything, all pieces of the universe are for our good. Everything is good that God has made, so God is good.

That's also made very clear in what Paul says to the church at Corinth when he's asking them to give generously. You should remember he was asking them to give to the church of Jerusalem, the church that had been so negative to taking in the Gentiles. They had, in a sense, been enemies, and Paul's saying, "Yes, but you must be generous to them." Why? Well you know well the generosity of Jesus. Although he was rich, he made himself poor to make you rich through his father. Jesus, one who was rich but made himself poor; one who is totally generous; one who becomes a friend.

And that's how Jesus acts in today's Gospel, isn't it? The first thing that happens in the Gospel is this very important official comes to Jesus. He's the leader of the synagogue; everybody in the village knows him, but he's as helpless as anybody else when his little daughter is at the point of death. So he comes to Jesus and right away Jesus begins to respond. His heart goes out with compassion for these parents who're about to lose their tiny child whom they love, obviously. So heart breaking when something like that happens -- a little child dies.

Jesus immediately has compassion, reaches out in love. His compassion and his generosity and his love are shown even more dramatically in what happens next. We have to be aware of all that is going on in this episode. Remember the end when the woman finally comes up to Jesus? Mark says she was trembling with fear. She was afraid she had done something terribly wrong. Because of her infirmity, because of her illness, because of her bleeding, she was "unclean" according to the law. She could not go into the temple or the synagogue. She had to be apart from the rest of the people, and she thought Jesus would be angry with her because she touched Jesus and he became "unclean." According to the law he would not be allowed in the temple until he was purified.

But Jesus wasn't angry. Obviously, he was amazed, and he reached out in love. He wanted to be sure that this woman did not think this was something magic. And that was the danger. She touched his clothing, and she

might have thought, "Well, it's magic, I'm cured now." No, it was the love of God reaching out to her through Jesus who was reaching out to her as a friend.

Another point about this that I think is so important is that Jesus wanted to make sure that there was a connection. Jesus never worked miracles from a distance. He never tried to cure people without being right in their presence. Jesus wanted to connect with people, interact, know them and let them know him. That's what happens when you become a friend. You open your heart to another person and that person opens his or her heart to you. You can't do it unless there is some kind of connection and so Jesus wanted to be sure that this woman knew that he loved her, that there was this connection, that she was his friend, that she had opened herself to him and he was ready to pour forth his love upon her. So Jesus shows himself. Jesus, who we remember is God, shows himself in this very human, real way as a friend, as one who reaches out in love, in kindness, compassion, generosity.

Notice how Jesus doesn't hesitate. He might have had other plans when he came and landed on that shore but as soon as people came up to him, wanted his help, he dropped everything and was ready to go and do whatever was necessary.

And I think you get a final sense of how human Jesus is, how real he is, when at the end of the incident today, other people were all, I suppose, chattering away, talking in amazement about what had happened and Jesus is very practical -- "This little girl is hungry. Give her something to eat." He cared about this little girl. And so Jesus shows us today in the Scriptures how he is a friend to us.

It's difficult to put these two truths together. Jesus is Son of God in power but he is also a brother, a friend to every one of us. Once we begin to really enter into this mystery, to know Jesus as Son of God, to know Jesus as the one who made the heavens and the earth, but also as our closest friend. Once we really enter into this mystery, it can change our lives. Because we'll begin to realize, first of all, that at any moment, whenever we're in need, when we're in pain of some sort be it physical or emotional or whatever, we can turn to Jesus who will be right there, to respond to us out of the abundance of his generosity and love.

But then also as we really come to enter into the mystery of Jesus as Son of God and our brother, we'll be inspired to try to follow him and what a difference that can make in our world -- if we reach out to every other person as a friend, ready to open ourselves, to share what we have. One of the things that marks our community here at St. Leo is that spirit of friendship and love that people say they experience when they come here. We know, all of us who come regularly, that one of the blessings that we have is that we love one another, we reach out in joy and friendship during every liturgy, but, of course, our love goes beyond our parish family.

On Tuesday this week we'll be trying to show our generosity and love helping people in the neighborhood who are hungry to be fed, and that's something that goes on every day. We do this as a community. Each of us now must try to make sure that in our own lives every day we reach out in love, that we become a friend to others, that we make that real connection. Not to just write a check for the poor, but to connect with the poor, whoever they are, wherever they are. Whether they're poor spiritually or physically or financially.

If we really enter into the mystery of who Jesus is, every day will be marked by our generosity to others. So as we leave the church today, I hope we will be singing in our hearts, "What a friend we have in Jesus" and that we will know his friendship to us and that we will share his friendship wherever we are.