

Realizing that bond we have with Jesus

Thomas Gumbleton | Aug. 4, 2011 | The Peace Pulpit

To begin our reflection today, I thought I might call attention first of all to those inspiring and encouraging words from Paul's letter to the Church at Rome that we heard as our second lesson.

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"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then he asks, "Will it be trials or anguish, persecution or hunger, lack of clothing, dangers or sword? No," he says, "In all of this, we are more than conquerors thanks to the One who has loved us. I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor spiritual powers, neither the present nor the future, nor cosmic powers, where they from heaven or from the deep world below, not any creature shall separate us from the love of God which we have in Jesus Christ."

Isaiah 55:1-3
Psalm 145:8-9, 15-16, 17-18
Romans 8:35, 37-39
Matthew 14:13-21

That's such a powerful statement about how we are related to God. We're caught up in the love of God because of Jesus and we might not notice it at first because the Gospel lesson chosen for today continues -- and we will dwell on this -- Jesus' teaching about the Reign of God that is at hand, and asking us to change our lives so we enter into that Reign of God.

Before we continue that reflection on the Reign of God, I think we can understand better why nothing can separate us from the love of God if we really enter into a deep relationship with Jesus.

As I've mentioned times before, we connect with Jesus in a very deep and spiritual, but very human way, when we connect with Jesus who is like us in every way but sin.

One like us, fully human, and if we take those times in the Gospels where we hear or find out about Jesus experiencing the kinds of things that we experience and we enter into communion with Him in those experiences, there is a bond that develops.

Today, our Gospel begins with Jesus setting out by boat for a secluded place, but when we connect that with what happened just before, we find out something about Jesus that I think helps us to know Jesus deeply, united with Him.

Just before, in Matthew's Gospel, we hear about John the Baptist being imprisoned and then martyred, beheaded by King Herod who had become very fearful of John. After that happened, John's disciples came. Matthew tells us they came and took John's body away and buried it. Then they went away to bring the news to Jesus. So then, Matthew says on hearing this, Jesus set out for this secluded place. If we reflect for even a moment and begin to unite with Jesus, we understand He's upset.

When Jesus began His public life, Jesus became a disciple of John. He was close to John from the very beginning of their lives, John and Jesus.

Jesus also probably felt some fear because Herod couldn't take the preaching of John, and he begins to see Jesus as another John coming forward. So the life of Jesus is in danger, but I think He goes away to be by Himself for a while in order to absorb the suffering and transform it within Himself as a way of accepting God's call or God's will in His life.

If we connect with that, we come close to Jesus.

That's one of the most important things that can happen as we celebrate our Liturgy of the Word every week, and if we continue to read the Scriptures during the week, we come to know Jesus more deeply.

We are bonded to Him.

Then nothing, as Paul declares, can separate us from the love of God that we know in Christ Jesus. Now we need to continue our reflections on what Jesus has been proclaiming about the Reign of God.

Remember the last couple of Sundays: we heard seven different parables, helping us to understand the Reign of God.

Now, in today's Gospel, we see in action, in a sense, what the Reign of God will mean. The Reign of God means when all of our lives, all of creation is under that saving love of God, where God's love rules the lives of all of us, it sets the structure of our lives and of all creation. When we live that way, then what happens in today's Gospel shows us what the Reign of God means.

First of all, the people are lacking food out here in this secluded place, and so the disciples become concerned, but then Jesus reminds them, "Look, God made this world with all that we need for everyone to have a full human life."

That's what is suggested to us in the first lesson today, where Isaiah proclaims to the people, "Come, all you who are thirsty. Come to the water. All who have no money, come. Yes, without money and at no cost, have, buy and drink wine and milk. All the food that you need, God gave it for all. God made this whole universe for all of us, for the whole human race. Everyone has a right to what God made for all so that everyone has the opportunity for a full human life." Jesus lays that out clearly with what happens in today's Gospel.

Take those two loaves and the few fish. Jesus blesses them, but then He says to the disciples, "You distribute them," and they begin to. People begin to interact with one another, to share. Everyone has more than they need because everyone is sharing with everyone else.

What a beautiful image of the Reign of God, but sadly enough, how far we are from that. God intended the world for all, not for a few, and yet, we have a world right now, don't we, where so few have so much and so many have so little. Those were words proclaimed by Oscar Romero so often about his country of El Salvador, but it's true of the world.

So few have so much while so many have so little.

We have an extraordinary famine going on now in Africa, in a couple of the countries of Africa where there has been a drought. It's estimated that millions of people will die shortly. They are fleeing their country, trying to find refuge in another country, but it's an overwhelming situation.

That's not the Reign of God. The Reign of God would be where everyone has an opportunity for this full human life. All have a chance to share in the goods of the earth that God gave for all. So that reminds us.

After Jesus invites us to enter into the Reign of God, Jesus explains to us what the Reign of God is. He also calls us, and we've heard this before, but it's so important. Our task as His disciples, as the community of disciples of Jesus, is to transform our world into as close an image of the Reign of God as possible.

It's not supposed to be the way it is, but we haven't really carried out our work as disciples of Jesus. There are ways we have to change things within our own country: the struggle we're having in our Congress right now over our debt and the need to change tax patterns, and to help bring about a redistribution of wealth in our country.

We find fewer and fewer are getting more and more, and more and more people are falling behind. We have a responsibility to search out how it should be and how it could be if we really worked seriously, faithfully, fervently, strenuously, to transform our world into as close an image of the Reign of God as possible.

This morning then, as we reflect on these Scripture passages, we have much to take home with us to reflect on and let enter deeply into our awareness, to help to change us. We have better understanding, I hope, how God has given the world for all.

No one should have to pay in order to have a full human life. God provided all the resources necessary for that, if only we find the way to share those resources more equally, so that all have what they have a right to. Also, we begin to understand better what the Reign of God will be like. It will be like those people in the desert, no one excluded. Whoever is there, they all have the opportunity to share, to rejoice, to have this happy time out there in that secluded place. Jesus calls us.

Just one final thing: this is so clear that this is an image of the Eucharist. He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and then the disciples distributed it. That's the Eucharist, isn't it? Here and now, at this Eucharist we -- all of us, no one excluded -- share in this Bread of Life.

That's what nurtures us; so we will leave here today, I hope, with a deeper understanding, a closer bonding to Jesus, and a determination to do what we can to transform this world into as close an image of the Reign of God as possible, to enter into the work of Jesus and bring forth the fullness of God's Reign.

That's what Jesus is about and that's what will happen, but we are called to enter into this work of Jesus. It requires us to decide how we are going to do it, and as we do it, never to worry.

Nothing, once we are bonded with Jesus, can separate us from that love of God. We know we have the strength and we'll have the courage and wisdom to do this work that is our calling as disciples of Jesus.

[This homily was given at St. Leo Catholic Church in Detroit, Mich.]

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