

Homily For Tuesday of the 14th Week of Ordinary Time- Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - July 9, 2019

Genesis 32:22-32 "I have seen God face to face and yet my life is preserved."

Psalms 26 "When I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness."

Matthew 8:23-27 "Never has anything like this been seen in Israel ... When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd."

Seeing Is Believing ... Or Not

Introduction

It is the greatest of joys for me to be assisting Fr. Troy for my first time. Fr. Jonathan asked if I would mind Fr. Troy doing the preaching today. Of course, I said 'No way!' ... Not really. Actually, Fr. Troy was very gracious in offering that privilege back to me.

Many times in the last year, I have briefly glanced to my left at Deacon Troy while we were both kneeling during the consecration. I know my attention was supposed to be entirely on the most sacred and solemn actions taking place on the altar, but I couldn't help wondering, just for a moment, whether he was thinking about the time when he would raise the transubstantiated elements and proclaim, in the person of Christ, "This is my body ... This is my blood."

In the end, though, I believe he was doing what we are all so privileged to do, which is simply to see and to know the joy of our God and saviour, who is risen, who is alive, who died for us, who has never abandoned us but who lives with us always in the great act of Thanksgiving, the Eucharist.

Face To Face

"I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." That's what Jacob declared after he had wrestled with God's angel all night long.

There are so many connections to make in today's scriptures, so many ways for us to see God. There is also a great warning to us that it is possible to lose that

vision. Let us consider a few of those connections and whether we might see God face to face.

Matthew

The man possessed with a demon is unable to speak until that demon is cast out by Jesus. But when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of being possessed by demons, he doesn't speak. Jesus is mute in the face of their criticism. Does that mean they are right and he does have a demon? Of course not. It's their own sin which makes it impossible for him to get through to them. The Pharisees were supposed to be the ones to help people see God. They were supposed to be the shepherds. But they couldn't see the God in front of them, which is Jesus.

Jesus is the one who does see God with crystal clarity. And what does today's Gospel tell us he saw? Jesus saw the crowds. He saw that they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd, an image of hopelessness which draws compassion from him.

The harvest is plentiful because the crowds of people are in a state of not seeing God and needing to turn to the shepherd. Matthew tells us that the people declare with amazement, "Never has anything like this been seen in Israel." But the first reading today is an indication that the people have lost sight and memory of their own divine history.

Genesis

Jacob, one of the three great patriarchs of the people of God, wrestled with God for his blessing. He had earlier wrestled his father's blessing away from his brother, Esau. What is so special about that blessing that Jacob pursued so fiercely? The word for ultimate blessing is one you might recognize. It is 'beatitude'. To see God is to experience beatitude. The beatitudes of the sermon on the mount are the ways Jesus explains to participate in the kingdom of God, which is to see God's face. Only those who are close to the kingdom of heaven can see like this, and to see like this is to be not far from the kingdom of heaven.

Jacob reminds us not to be lukewarm in seeking to see God. But the story also has another warning, which is not to become proud in that desire. Why wouldn't God tell his name? Why do you ask my name, he asks? The power of naming is God's alone, because that is where we get our identity from. Who does the naming? It's God, because it is God who gives us the name which identifies us as his children, his sheep.

Call To Action

There is the cute story of the teacher asking a little girl what she is drawing. "God," she says. And, when the teacher tells her that no one knows what God looks like, she declares, "They will when I am finished." That's probably unfair to the teacher. Or maybe she hadn't read today's psalm, which declares, "I shall see your face." It's not clear in our translation of this psalm, but another translation follows that line with, "The reward of virtue is to see your face. When I awake I will behold your likeness." Virtue is the character we develop through the constant practice of obedience to truth and goodness. It's not hidden from us. Seeing God face to face is a kind of openness to the vision that God already wants us to have.

How so many of us are harassed and helpless because of stubbornness against the voice and the vision of the shepherd. I will end with the beginning. In the Collect, Fr. Troy prayed on our behalf to God, "Protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing has a firm foundation. Without whom nothing is holy." This is what we are to see today. So many around us are looking for a foundation to build on, when it is right in front of us. It is in the person of Jesus, who is right in front of us in his word, in the priesthood, in the Eucharist we are privileged to celebrate with Fr. Troy today.