

Homily For Tuesday of the 18th Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - August 3, 2021

Numbers 12:1-13 "Why were you not afraid to speak against my servant?"

Psalms 51:1-11 "Against you, you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight."

Matthew 14:22-36 "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Questions From God

Introduction

In 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote his classic work, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Carnegie had two great pieces of advice. The first was, "Be a good listener." The second was, "Ask questions the other person will enjoy answering." More than 80 years later, most people still fail to heed Carnegie's advice. However, that problem is a lot older than 80 years. The two problems of being a good listener and of asking the right questions are woven right into the history of God's plan to save us and bring us back into intimate and loving relationship with our creator God. In general, we will always find that the first part of Carnegie's advice belongs to us: Be a good listener to God. We will also find that things work best when God's question to us is not so comforting but, rather, demands that we make a change in our behaviour, starting in our hearts.

Numbers

Four thousand years ago, Miriam and Aaron were leaders amongst the people. But that wasn't good enough for them. They want a piece of the status Moses has with God. They try out their own question, which sounds something like, "How come he always gets to be the one who talks for God? What are we, chopped liver? After all, hasn't God spoken through us, also?"

What we see should not surprise us, even from this hero and this heroine of the biblical story. They are human after all, and they are jealous of Moses privileged position with God. Not only that, but they use the age old tactic of character assassination to attack Moses. What about that Cushite woman, that foreigner he

has for a wife? She's not one of us. They can't even attack Moses directly because, as the text indicates, he is the most humble one of the whole people, which is why God speaks to him as a friend, face to face. That kind of intimacy with God always requires total humility, a recognition of God's greatness, and our smallness next to God.

But they aren't really speaking against Moses' wife, are they? In fact, they are not even really speaking against Moses. They are rejecting God's appointed leader, which means they are speaking against God himself. Of course they don't fool God, whose anger is kindled against them. Here is where God departs from Dale Carnegie's advice. He doesn't ask them a question they will enjoy answering. God asks a question you and I should try to avoid having to be asked if we can help it (which we always can). That question is: "Why weren't you afraid to speak against my servant?" It goes beside other equally uncomfortable questions such as, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

But all is not lost, even when God is angry. When Miriam is struck with leprosy, Aaron immediately recognizes the sin they have committed. He prays for forgiveness. Today we read part of psalm 51. That was the act of contrition King David prayed centuries later, after he had committed murder to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba. In a way, the church puts those words in Aaron's mouth. But it is a reminder that even God's greatest leaders will have to humble themselves to be healed.

Next we see who prays for Miriam and Aaron. It's the one who himself was attacked. This is proof of his great humility. In this way, among many others, we here today should see a foreshadowing of another one who is attacked and betrayed and who prays for his persecutors, even while he was suffering their blows and humiliation.

Moses points back to Adam who, before his sin, had intimacy with God. Moses himself had angered God when he was refusing to go to Pharaoh. But he was purified by the service he rendered to God's people.

Jesus

Today's gospel event begins right after Jesus has fed the people. He sends the disciples away so he can commune with the Father in intimate face to face friendship. The disciples are physically without Jesus in facing the storm on the sea. But when they are at the end of their strength, Jesus comes to them on the water. Why did Jesus walk? He could have just flown there. He could have simply shown up and calmed the sea. Instead, he shows what is possible when God is close at hand. Peter gets it. He knows that, with the humility of Moses, and the trust in the saviour, he can do what Jesus does.

Of course, he also fails because of his fear of the wind and the waves. How many times do we lose heart because of the storms in our lives? For most of us, I think it is a lot. And so, with Peter, we are going to hear that other question that Dale Carnegie would advise against: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When we doubt, we sink beneath the waves. But when we cry out, Jesus is there to reach out and catch us from drowning. If we are to follow Carnegie's other advice, "Be a good listener", we will hear Jesus say, "Take heart. Do not be afraid."

Call To Action

What are we to take from these powerful images today? Well, first, we must do our best to be humble before God, but also to trust in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. These things are always true.

Second, we must not be afraid to hear God ask us hard questions when we need them to motivate us to return to humble and intimate relationship.

Next we must acknowledge God's appointed leaders, in the Church and in society. This does not mean we should accept bad behaviour. We have seen how, even in the Church, we should have asked hard questions of those who abused the trust placed in them. We should also have challenged our government leaders in their policies of cultural genocide against indigenous peoples.

Finally, Jesus Christ has opened the door for each person to have the intimate, face to face friendship with God that Moses had, and that Jesus personified in himself. He is not a ghost. He is our saviour in the storm. Let us not be afraid.

Key Scripture Passages

Numbers: *Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses. Has the Lord not spoken through us also? Now Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth. Then the Lord said, "Hear my words. When there are prophets among you, I the Lord make myself known to them in visions and dreams. Not so with my servant Moses. With him I speak face to face. He is entrusted with all my house. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant?" Miriam became leprous. Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh my Lord do not punish us for a sin that we have so foolishly committed." Moses cried to the Lord, "O God, please heal her."*

Psalms: *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. Blot out my transgressions and cleanse me from my sin. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

Matthew: *After the crowd had eaten enough, Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead. He went up the mountain by himself to pray. The boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land. Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. The disciples were terrified, saying: "It is a ghost." Jesus spoke: "Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. Peter answered him: "Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. Jesus said: "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus reached out and caught him, saying: "You of little faith, why did you doubt? When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying: "Truly you are the Son of God." When they had crossed over, the people brought all who were sick to him, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.*