

Homily for August 23, 2019

Loyal and Faithful

One of the all-time greats in baseball was Babe Ruth. His bat had the power of a cannon, and his record of 714 home runs remained unbroken until Hank Aaron came along. The Babe was the idol of sports fans, but in time age took its toll, and his popularity began to wane. Finally the Yankees traded him to the Braves. In one of his last games in Cincinnati, Babe Ruth began to falter. He struck out and made several misplays that allowed the Reds to score five runs in one inning. As the Babe walked toward the dugout, chin down and dejected, there rose from the stands an enormous storm of boos and catcalls. Some fans actually shook their fists. Then a wonderful thing happened. A little boy jumped over the railing, and with tears streaming down his cheeks he ran out to the great athlete. Unashamedly, he flung his arms around the Babe's legs and held on tightly. Babe Ruth scooped him up, hugged him, and set him down again. Patting him gently on the head, he took his hand and the two of them walked off the field together.

In today's reading from Ruth Naomi must've felt something like Babe Ruth. Her husband had died, years earlier, now her sons were gone and she was going to return to Bethlehem with her head down, bitter and alone.

As she turns toward Bethlehem she counsels her daughters-in-law to leave her. Ruth will hear none of it. Like that little boy she takes Naomi's hand and declares words that are among the most memorable in the Bible:

Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; ¹⁷ where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.¹

Ruth is like the boy who took the hand of another Ruth, named Babe. Ruth showed in a world of jeers of hostility what it meant to live as a woman of gracious loyalty. We read at the end of the Book of Judges, the biblical story that precedes Ruth these words:

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.²

Twice in the Book of Judges this sentence is used. Now listen again to how the Book of Ruth opens:

¹ [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ru 1:16–17). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

² [The Holy Bible](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Jdg 21:25). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab,³

In those days when every man did what he wanted, there was a woman named Ruth who showed such sacrificial loyalty to another, one person who did not what was right in her own eyes, but what was right for Naomi.

Now this is what I want you to see about Ruth's loyalty. In Bethlehem, a word that means: "House of Bread", there was a famine, there was no bread. But the famine wasn't only physical it was also spiritual. The Jewish people had turned their hearts away from God to such an extent that it is in Moab, a perennial enemy of Israel, that in the example of a foreigner, Ruth the Moabitess, that we find a true Israelite because she lives not for herself but for God and Naomi.

Because of her faithfulness, Ruth mirrors the faithfulness of God and is used by God in a way the far exceeds what she would ever know. Remember we are told that in the day of the Judges there was no king? Well the Book of Ruth is a love story where not only does Ruth love Naomi but she falls in love with a man named Boaz, who becomes her husband, and they become the great grandparents of Israel's greatest king, David. David is the last word in the Book of Ruth. The man who would become Israel's greatest King, and who would be the precursor of the true King, born in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We in turn are called in an age when people do what is right in their own eyes and have no king to live like Ruth. Our king, Jesus calls us to love God and one another with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. May Ruth's example inspire us to such loyalty and faithful love.

³ [*The Holy Bible*](#). (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ru 1:1). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.