

Homily for October 5th 2018

Have you ever had the experience where you have perceived someone is upset with you because their words or body language suggest to you they are angry?

Sometimes our perceptions can be accurate, that a person is upset with us. But sometimes it can be our interpretation of their words and actions that when we ask them about it, we realize I misunderstood what they were saying.

Today's Gospel is a classic example where it would be really easy to conclude Jesus is some angry with the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Listen to his words one more time:

Woe to you Bethsaida and you Chorazin, not to mention Capernaum. If the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes... Will you be exalted to heaven? No you will be brought down to Hades.

Okay so what is going on here? It helps to know something about the places mentioned to understand the point. Capernaum was one of Jesus' headquarters during the three years of his public ministry. It was in the Northern Province of Galilee and a place Jesus spent lots of time. Capernaum was kind of like Calgary, but way smaller, and Bethsaida and Chorazin were even smaller communities, kind of like Airdre and Biesiker.

Jesus is saying that here I have been with you performing signs of God coming to you and you are saying, "Big Deal. Who do you think you are and why should we listen to you anyhow.?"

Jesus gives the answer by saying that if I had gone even farther north to the towns of Tyre and Sidon, which aren't even in Israel, and are non-Jewish communities, they would have listened to me and repented in ashes and sackcloth. This language is code for people who are really wanting to change their ways.

For you see that is what the word repentance means. In Greek, the language of the New Testament the word for repentance is called a compound word, it's made up of two parts. The whole word is metanoia.

Meta means "to change" and "noia" means mind. Metanoia means therefore to change one's mind, to see the world from a different perspective. What Jesus is getting at is that if we don't take him into consideration as we try to make sense of the world, things will be, well kind of like Hades.

In Greek mythology Hades was a god whose name means 'The Unseen.' He was lord of the underworld, the abode of the dead.¹ So Hades was the place of the dead where people dwelt in utter silence and gloom. It was a place where there was neither worship of God nor memory of him. So do you see what Jesus is getting at? Here he was resident in Capernaum, bringing the Good News of God's loving presence; but they said "no thanks, we would rather continue to live

¹ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [*Harper's Bible dictionary*](#) (1st ed., p. 365). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

without a deeper sense of life's purpose and meaning that you can bring to us Jesus. We don't want to have you influence our minds and thus our lives". And so Jesus says in effect, if you don't want what I have to offer, then you will be left knowing life as grey and bleak, without deeper meaning – like Hades.

But what happens in turn when we do allow for metanoia, a change of mind to take place as we allow for Jesus' influence in our lives. Listen to the answer King David gives to this question:

if I make my bed in *Sheol*, you are there.

Sheol, is another way of saying Hades. David is telling us that it is never too late to experience metanoia, a change of mind. When we do we come to an experience of God's presence in our lives and regardless of where I am, even in Hades. When this happens we discover a deepening confidence and trust in the merciful goodness of Jesus, stated by David this way:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² *You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.*

³ *You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.*

So do you see what Jesus is saying in this Gospel? They aren't so much words of anger but words of warning. What he desires for us is to have the confidence of David in the ever present love of Jesus. For this to happen we are continually invited to metanoia, a change of mind as we allow Jesus to speak to us through the Scriptures, teaching of the Church and Sacraments and so affirm:

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.* ²

This dear ones is the opposite of Hades and what Jesus desired for the people of Chorizan, Bethsaida and Capernaum. And it is what he desires for you and me.

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Ps 139:13–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.