

Sunday 10

June 10, 2018

All of our readings for today are worthy, very worthy of our attention. The first one from Genesis is a study in human psychology. No one is willing to take the blame for the loss of human innocence. The man blames God who gave him this woman: “The woman you put here with me...,” Adam says to God. The woman blames the serpent: “The serpent tricked me into it....,” Eve tells God. The serpent does not attempt to defend himself. Thank God, for that would have made the whole scene unbelievable in our eyes. But the other parts are very believable. We do feel very ashamed without our clothes on, and here that is attributed to our estrangement from God. In our original innocence we would not have felt that shame. And we all know how very human it is to blame anyone but ourselves when things go wrong. But there is no going back now. We cannot “uneat” the apple. We cannot do without our clothes. We know the difference between good and evil, and we know our weakness with things evil. The race is on for the salvation of the world and the human race.

But help has come, our second reading tells us. Even though we are condemned to die, even though, as Paul puts it, our outward

self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed from day to day. Even more than that, we know that if our earthy dwelling, our life here, is merely a tent, so something very temporary, not permanent, God has built a house for us in a new land, the eternal land of his love. Who would prefer a tent to a real house? Only those who don't believe that there is a house waiting for them in the eternal land of God's love.

But our Gospel keeps our eyes fixed on our tent, our life here and now. Not our life but the Lord's, and it tells us that he is getting mixed reviews to his preaching. The crowds love him. They are flocking to him. Who wouldn't? He is preaching Good News and he can also heal people. "What is not to like?" we might ask. But two groups find much not to like. The first group is made up of the scribes, that is, people who study and write about the law of God, the intelligentsia of the Jewish people. They cannot deny the miracles he has worked but they can see them not as an expression of God's love for people but rather as the expression of the evil one's power over people. Jesus' answer to their claim is: Why would the evil one be doing away with evil? Would the evil one be destroying his own kingdom? Evil casting out evil? That makes no sense. No, if evil is losing its grip on people, that can only be because God who is good is overcoming it. Only God is strong

enough to bind evil and cast it out. But to call God's power the evil one's power is blasphemy and is a very serious sin, indeed a sin that will never go away, the Lord says.

The second group critical of Jesus is his own family. How frank Mark's Gospel, the oldest Gospel, is. It recorded for all history the fact that the Lord's own family thought he was "out of his mind." It therefore comes to do what any good family would do: get hold of him and remove him from public view. If there had been insane asylums at that time, it would have committed Jesus to one of them.

But why did the members of his family think he was insane? Because this public person cannot be the same person they knew, the boy and young man of Nazareth. His words of wisdom—or what people claim are his words of wisdom---and his healings—or what people say are his healings—cannot really be his. He is not capable of such things. He is kidding himself and therefore kidding his public. He is disillusioned, which is a softer way of saying he is out of his mind.

All three synoptic gospels share the material about the scribes claiming that the Lord was casting out evil by the power of

Beelzebul, but only Mark has this passage about the Lord's family coming to get him because they think he has lost his mind. But all three describe a scene in which the Lord returns to his hometown of Nazareth after having become famous and goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and begins to teach there. The people there take offense. "Where does he get all this?" they ask. They know who he is. He is just one of us. They are offended because someone who is their equal or even their inferior is now claiming to be a learned scholar. Jesus, we are told, marveled at their unbelief. Luke fills out this scene a little more. He tells us that Jesus read from a passage of the prophet Isaiah which talked about the Spirit of the Lord coming upon someone and anointing that person to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release for captives and recovery of sight for the blind, and liberty for the oppressed. Then he sat down and said: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In other words, I am the one described by Isaiah. At first they seem open to his claim. They ask him to do here in Nazareth the miracles he reportedly has done in other places. When Jesus refuses to do that, they become angry. They take him to a hill on which Nazareth was built with the intention of throwing him over it to his death. Somehow he escapes.

The loss of innocence, the contrast between a tent and a house, the rejection of the Lord by the scribes and even by his family. What do these texts offer for our reflection? All three readings speak of conflicts or at least contrast. There is a contrast between the tent and the house in Paul's text. There is conflict in the other two readings: the conflict created between God and us by our misuse of our freedom in the reading in Genesis, and the conflict between Jesus and the scribes and his family in our Gospel from Mark. If we were to attempt to remove the conflicts described here, we could say with respect to the Genesis conflict: admit your guilt, own up to your actions, take responsibility for them and stop blaming others for your own sins. A call for honesty, a call for the recognition of the truth. May that happen in our lives. May it also happen today in our national life! May it happen in our Church! With respect to the conflict in our Gospel reading, we could say something very similar: admit that this man is the boy you knew, but he has grown up. Accept him now as he and judge him by his actions, not by your prejudices. And don't call evil good! Again the call for honesty and truth. And the call for the way to the recognition of honesty and truth: the honest use of words so that they reveal reality and do not disguise it. Even as the Lord himself says: "Let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.'"

Anything more is from the evil one” (Mt 5:37). Perhaps we could, perhaps we should start there.