

Introducing Ordinary Time



Wellsprings of Faith

21st June 2009

Note:

1. *In the scripture commentary, the divine name is represented as, 'YHWH'. That is unpronounceable! If we want to use the divine name, its important to be aware of the Hebrew practice of not pronouncing the divine name, but of using, "God" (Elohim), or more often, "Adonai" (My LORD). When the Hebrews translated their scriptures from the original language into Greek, they never wrote down the name, "YaHWeH," but rendered it by, "Kyrios"(LORD). Such was the trouble they took, to avoid the suggestion that, by naming the "Holy One," they had some kind of power to contain God's reality in the naming process. In the text and in our comments, we follow the practise of the New Jerusalem Bible translators, but we signify the divine name as, "YHWH."*

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no.3

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So-called, “Ordinary Time” is the period when we focus on the systematic reading of the gospel of Mark for the remainder of the 2009 Church Year. The gospel readings of, “Ordinary Time,” are our check-list for, “doing the Word,” as disciples of Jesus. Rather than understanding “ordinary time” as a return to “business-as-usual,” it is about developing and extending the reigning of God in our world. And we do it according to the pattern of partnership that Jesus revealed, in the mystery of the holy Trinity!

Introduction

The account of Jesus and His disciples in a boat out on the Lake of Galilee in the midst of a storm, (*Mark 4:35-41 - Twelfth Sunday Ordinary Time*) introduces the theme of the faith while living, 'in the world.' The gospel story of the instant calming of the storm, was told for the benefit of a frightened community.

Today, facing growing economic and social storms, we Christians also take fright! Jesus seems to be more soundly asleep and as unaware of our plight, as He seemed to be of the plight of those disciples with Him in the boat on Lake Galilee! In the midst of the shattering experiences of our daily life, we are reminded by such readings, of the Words and Actions of Jesus! Through this remembering, we find guidance, unity and reinforcement, towards a new understanding of our situation, as we extend and develop the creative, redeeming and sanctifying power of the holy Trinity, to the realities of our world.

The first Christian communities read this gospel story in light of the events of their own time - and the Word of God, in Jesus, restored order and calmness! So we too listen to the Word of God today and we share in an Eucharistic action that announces that in Jesus: there is a God who overcomes chaos; who is aware of our peril; and who encourages us to reclaim control over our life and destiny!!!

The Readings (12th Sunday of Ordinary Time – 21.06.2009)

Job 38 : 1, 8 - 11

Job's comforters have had their say. Job has replied to them. They haven't answered his earlier question - Job speaks as an innocent victim who doesn't understand how the "forces of history" - that is, the system - works! "Why do the wicked still live on, their power increasing with their age?"

The divine Speaker asks Job to continue to trust in a God who: "*Laid the Earth's foundation;*" and "*gave birth to the sea and swaddled it in cloud;*" and "*who is powerful, wise and trustworthy.*" In a final declaration of his innocence, Job had still been speaking trustingly as one who believes in 'the system' and that the system will produce happiness (cf Jb.32:2-5). It's here that a grand promise is placed on YHWH's lips;

You will again inhabit the land and you will live well! (cf Jb.32:15).

But how are the innocent redressed and the wicked punished? The author of Job declares that the awesome forces that leap out and threaten to engulf everything, are taken by the holy One and treated like a small baby; compressed, set in natural boundaries, thrown in a quilt blanket of clouds and swaddled in darkness (Jb.38:8-11). In other words, the writer spies a playful, mighty, caring God behind the awesome forces of Nature. This God acts in ways that Job can't work out! He must still trust. And later, Job does receive an answer that he can understand:

*Then there came to Job, all his brothers and sisters
and all who had known him before,
and they all ate bread with him in his house;
they showed him sympathy and comforted him
for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him;
and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring.*

(Jb.42:11)

The Book of Job, taken in its totality, states that although history works so that the wicked prosper and the innocent suffer, YHWH God finally redresses the innocent! And this redressing is done through the practices of the human community! The rehabilitation of land, house, wealth, animals etc... is done through the payments, deeds, and measures - of people! Job's questioning isn't answered in an act, "out of the blue" by God! The righting of injustices is done through the structures and processes of society! Society makes concrete day-to-day justice available. The promises of God are realised through a fair social process - or they are not realised at all!!

2 Corinthians 5 : 14 – 17

In a religion of incarnation, the holy is never present apart from the

reality of brothers and sisters who "give" and "take away." St. Paul tries to see in others what Jesus saw in them (vv.16-17). He tries to see why Jesus died for them and what makes them lovable to the death! Paul does not accept people just because Jesus did. He expects to find in them something attractive and appealing. Something commands his caution and sensitivity with regard to other people - he had been "burned" once - when he totally misread Jesus! He had thought that Jesus was merely the founder of a dissident Hebrew religious sect! He had been proved profoundly wrong!

Paul is trying to correct the old discriminations where trouble-makers are considered (v.12). People priding themselves on their position in society rather than on what is nearest to their hearts! The common workers, (for example: tent-makers like himself) slaves and foreigners, were scarcely given the time of day, by the wealthy and powerful landed-gentry, merchants and the intellectual leaders.

Paul's opponents were demeaning his importance by making light of his vocation, appearance and behaviour. Paul had once lived that way himself - limited in perspective to a human point-of-view in his evaluation of Jesus. But now he knew better - he had been released from the old discriminations practised by his namesake (see 1 S.16:7).

Paul had entered into the freedom of the "new creation" (v.17). The old ways of courting the powerful and spurning the useless, have ended! A whole new life had come into being, in which Christ's people see not only Jesus, but everyone - including themselves - in a new light!! The Apostle to the Gentiles makes the point that the disciples of Jesus are controlled by the love that Christ has shown, in dying for them (v.14). And secondly, he understands that disciples are commissioned to call for this sort of reconciliation work (v.18).

Mark 4 : 35 – 41

The first Christian communities read the gospel story of the storm on the Lake of Galilee in the light of the events of their time. The words and actions of Jesus were later remembered in order to help a community that was mortally afraid of sinking beneath the chaotic pressures of their society.

Sudden storms were frequent on the Sea of Galilee. Mark says it was already night and Jesus was probably tired. He fell asleep even though the lake was stormy. Perhaps He went to sleep to teach the disciples how to behave when he wasn't there. This applies to us in many other things that have nothing to do with boats or waves, in other kinds of storms we have.

Faith is having trust in the company of Jesus, who goes with us on the stormy lake of a loveless world. That is like saying that faith is having trust in your friend. It is believing that the world can be changed by love - that evil can become good - that angry waves can be calmed.

It is faith in people who are united in community - that faith can calm storms! At one time we might have been content with the faith in a Jesus "in heaven," or, in a Jesus who isn't the one in the storm, or here with us today in the person of others; the Jesus who is with the community of disciples even though He is asleep!

After Jesus had calmed the lake, His words, "*Why are you so frightened?*" seem out of place (Mk.4:40-41). The disciples no longer had reason to be afraid, if the storm had passed. It is probable that these words were said much later. The Christian community gathered to hear the story of the gospel and were commenting on it. They applied these stories to their own situation. Sometimes the commentaries came to be part of the gospel. Here a commentator is encouraging the community not to be afraid during a time of persecution (perhaps by Nero at Rome).

When Jesus had explained the disciples' mission; "Let us go over to the other side of the lake"(v.35), they were going to spread the message of the reigning of God on the other shore of the Lake of Galilee. To be scared was to lack of faith in that reigning of God! Undoubtedly something once happened with Jesus on the lake, in a boat. There are very realistic details that were engraved on the memory of a witness - the fact that Jesus was asleep in the stern with his head on a cushion; the fact that there were other boats crossing. There may have been a squall. He may have calmed their great fright. But the words of Jesus are repeated in a new context, to address the fear that existed in a community that was mortally afraid of going under the pressures of their society.

Mark presents the person of Jesus in control of the forces of chaos, able to still the storms which threaten to overturn the community of the church. We see many "miracles" or "signs" that Jesus has performed through history. Transformations that His word has brought about in the lives of faithful believers. Yet we still often doubt that the world can be transformed; that the winds and the waves of history, can be calmed!?

Items for Sharing

- The Divine Speaker asks Job to continue to walk by faith in the God who laid the Earth's foundation; gave birth to the sea and swaddled it in clouds – who is powerful, wise and trustworthy.
Comment on the first reading from **Job 38 : 1, 8 – 11**.
- For a start Paul did not understand Christ's love in dying for everyone on the cross. But once he did understand, he could no longer resist the love that impelled him to devote his life to Christ – as a 'new creation' living with Christ for others!
Comment on the second reading from **2 Corinthians 5 : 14 – 17**.

- For the Hebrew people, and for the ancient world in general, the power of a storm was an image of the majesty of God. It also expressed their sense of helplessness in the face of death and chaos. Mark presents Christian disciples with a picture of Jesus who controls this force and is able to still the storms which threaten to capsize the community.
Comment on the reading from the gospel of **Mark 4 : 35 - 41**.

Prayer

God of the elements,
Ruler of winds and waves,
of rain and sun;
You sent us Your Son to sail
on the same boat with us;
to be our companion
sharing the same storms
and the same rough going.

With Him on board we are safe.
Help us to know Him;
in the beauty of His life,
in the wonder of His death
and in the power of His resurrection.

Deepen our faith in Him
and keep Him always with us,
to speak the Word
that calms the waves
and comforts hearts,
so that we will be renewed in Him.
Amen.

Reflection

Many 'storms' threaten the faith community in the modern world. In a secular culture, where moral values are in retreat, Christ's message for a reconstituted social order that harmonises the demands of peace and justice, has never been more necessary.

On the eve of the publication of Benedict XVI's new socio-economic encyclical, a work that is known to begin with the Latin words, "*Caritas in veritate*" clues to its contents, can be taken from earlier words of Benedict XVI. As Cardinal Ratzinger, he said in 1985, "*An economy without any ethical or religious foundation is destined for collapse.*" (At a conference

in English entitled, "Market Economy and Ethics."

Now that there actually has been a collapse, more detailed analyses and proposals are expected. A few months ago, as the encyclical was in the drafting phase, he responded to a question from a priest in Rome: *"It is the Church's duty to denounce the fundamental errors that have now been revealed in the collapse of the major American banks. Human greed is a form of idolatry... We must denounce this courageously, but also concretely, because grand moralizations are not helpful, if they are not supported by a familiarity with reality, which helps us to understand what can be done concretely... In the economy as well, justice is established only if there are just persons. And these persons are assembled through the conversion of hearts."* (Feb.26th 2009)

That Jesus' Word, as re-expressed in Catholic social teaching, can calm the economic and social storms of our time, to paraphrase Chesterton, "We find difficult to believe and haven't tried." Instead we, "cling to the wreckage of our failed systems, letting those of more robust faith swim for shore - and perish! We, the poorer in faith and swimming ability, wait for the rescue boat and hope to survive."

Set out for the shore - or stay clinging to the wreckage of our failed institutions? The Church's social teaching and its small but significant social services is the rescue-boat already close at hand. It is our best-kept secret! Benedict XVI's encyclical will be helpful in effecting a rescue for our failed systems. Like the disciples at sea with Jesus, we sense the transformation that Jesus' Word brings. The sleeping Jesus in our midst assures that we are not abandoned!

Someone provided a pillow! That kindness, hints that we all can make a contribution to transforming the chaos. The claiming of the victory over chaos doesn't follow easily or automatically from the announcement of transformation and it's liturgical re-enactment. Discipleship is difficult, costly and demanding! Benedict's encyclical will help.

For further study:

The Social Teachings of the Church in the face of the successes of Capitalism have taken on a rather defensive attitude. It has criticised this on specific points, instead of questioning it as such. The current evident collapse of Capitalism, because of its unlimited and almost unregulated expansion, can and should allow the Social Teachings of the Church a more radical contestation of Capitalism's values.

John Paul II, "Redemptor Hominis" 1979 no.16 also "Laborem Exercens" 1981 & "Centisimus Annus" 1991

Michael Sandel "The Reith Lectures 2009" A New Citizenship – currently being played on Radio NZ, National Programme 4.07pm Sundays.