

Homily for June 16, 2002
11th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

Exodus 19:2-6
Romans 5:6-11
Matthew 9:36-10:8

Christianity is comprised of two parts: come and see, and go and tell.

Years ago the Beatles had a popular song entitled “My Sweet Lord,” in which there were a number of petitions, cries almost, asking to see, to feel, to be in the presence of the Lord our God. I think for the most part we have faith – largely a notional thing – a belief that there is a God and that God is a loving God who wills good for humankind and for all creation. But when push comes to shove, when our backs are against the wall and the bill collector at the door and the diagnosis at the hospital, or the job security on the line, notional faith just won’t cut it. We need to feel, to see our sweet Lord.

In recent months, since the September 11 disaster and this prominent scandal of sexual abuse in the Church, I’ve increasingly fallen back upon a simple approach to prayer to the Father through Jesus Christ, in which I take my point of pain or hurt and ask of Jesus, “Lord, how did you handle your disillusionment

with religious leaders in your day? Lord, how did you deal with financial struggles in your life?” Granted, the questions are brief, but they call for a pause, a hiatus, a momentary listening, an expectation of a response from God – and oftentimes just a hint of peace can filter into what is otherwise a demoralizing situation. In this way, we “come and see” who God is. And once we have visited and seen, we can go and tell – be disciples, apostles, evangelists of God’s good news in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, this coming and seeing who God is in Jesus is not limited just to hardships and times of trial. Moments of joy and ecstasy put us in touch with God through Jesus. “Lord, what did you do on a summer’s eve? Lord, did you enjoy the aroma of the wildflowers in the heat of day?” It doesn’t matter what it is – good or bad, joy or sorrow, the humanity of Jesus, now glorified, becomes our gateway to the Father, our intersection with the peace only God can give. Truly we are not alone.

This relationship with God in Jesus, of coming and seeing and then going and telling, is operative across our lives, but often we miss the dynamics of the relationship. We tend to come to God to “get things.” We hope to have events manipulated on our behalf. Our prayer is often reduced to the pulling of a lever,

anticipating the dropping of the next pellet. And when God doesn't come through, we presume the machinery of religion must be broken. Even our belief in Jesus as risen from the dead can remain an abstract notion, a mental image, an intellectual hope, unless it becomes concrete and real for us by our contact in and through what we are experiencing at this very moment.

"Lord, what was it like for you to pray in the synagogue at Nazareth? Was it hard for you, Lord, to enter into the prayer? Lord, who taught you your first prayers as a young Jew? Lord, how did your prayer change over the years?"

When we get in touch with our immediate needs and feelings and pray out of those, the God who is always near draws closer still and empowers us to share our faith quite naturally with others.

A mother was preparing the family's favorite Sunday morning breakfast: pancakes. Ryan, age six, and Dan, age four, began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Mom saw this as a teachable moment.

"You know, boys, if Jesus was here he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.'"

Ryan turned to Dan, and with all the authority of an older brother, said, "Dan, you be Jesus."

Folks, we all be Jesus - and we pray through Jesus to the Father out of our joys and sorrows of each and every present moment.

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