

“Jesus, the Broken Record”

Homily of July 24, 2005

by Father Brian Joyce

I want to talk about the Gospel tonight, but before I'm going to use a footnote about that first reading in Soloman, King Soloman, who is the image for us, of the richest of the Kings, the wisest of the Kings, the wonderful of the Kings... and we hear him asking for wisdom and God saying, “That's what I'm going to give you. I'm going to give you wisdom.” But I want you to know he was just about the worst king the Israeli ever had. He stole the land from the people. He always was at war and, to finance his war, he put heavy loads of taxation and slavery on his own people. He is one of the worst kings in their history.

The truth of the passage is that the greatest gift we could have, or any leader could have, is wisdom and to pray for and look for wisdom in our own lives. And I think the subtext that I am pointing out to you is Beware of rulers and leaders and politicians who wrap themselves in piety and in patriotism. Beware of them whether they come from red states or blue states. It doesn't matter. And I think the test is that, first of all we have to do our homework. If we are looking at issues or at candidates or at leaders we have to do our homework. And then, secondly, we have to use as a criterion the very best values we can find, the values that really matter. And, in many cases, they have to be the values from the gospel.

Now, in the gospel today, Jesus is talking about values. But I felt like saying, “You know Jesus sounds, (in the last three weeks, we have been getting Matthew's Chapter 13.) and Jesus sounds like a broken record.” I was what I was going to say and then I realized that none of us have seen a record in a long, long time. ... We've got tape cassettes and we have CDs. I know a grandmother who took her grandchildren to the local museum to see what a phonograph looked like, because they had never seen one and they never will. But the point I wanted to make is that Jesus sounds stuck. He says “The Kingdom of God is like this.... No, the Kingdom of God is like this.... No, the Kingdom of God is like that.” In one short chapter, he does it seven times. Now, part of the fault belongs to Matthew because, Matthew as a gospel writer, what he does is he gathers all the actions of Jesus, the things Jesus is doing, and he puts them in one place. And he alternates with all the things Jesus is saying, all the words of Jesus, and he goes back and forth. And we are getting a chapter full of words.

I also think Jesus wants to hammer a point home. He wants to make sure we can get it. He even says, “Now hear this.” He says, “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear.” If you have ears, listen up. This is important! I think he repeats himself and comes at it different ways because it is too easy to mis-hear a message or too easy to mis-read a message or too easy to mistake or misunderstand a message. I saw a gathering of results, not from our parish, from another parish, answers for a test that they gave young people for Confirmation. One of the questions was to ask them about Matrimony. And one of the answers was “An appropriate name for marriage is ‘Holy Acrimony.’” “They wanted to ask them about monogamy and they said, “When spouses are together for their whole lives that is called ‘monotony.’” They were quizzed on the commandments. One of the commandments was the fourth commandment, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” And one student put down, “The fourth commandment is ‘Humor thy father and thy mother.’” And one student wrote, “Sometimes it is difficult to hear in church because the agnostics are so bad.”

.... So Jesus has a fairly good point in repeating it over and over again, different ways, so we won't miss the point. He repeats “The kingdom of God” (That's the presence of God in our midst.) “is like seeds scattered” “is like good seed mixed with weeds and wheat” or “like a mustard seed” or like “a little bit of yeast in a lump of flour” or like “a treasure in a field” or like “a pearl of great value” or “like a net that brings in all kinds of fish.” I think Jesus is saying what we are called to do is to NOTICE the presence of God, signs of th

presence of God in our midst, and to produce and yield, to do something about it.

The first step is to notice and I think that is what Jesus hammers at most of all. That is his biggest point. In saying that the Kingdom of God is at hand, the Kingdom of God is near and, yet, easily missed because it is a tiny seed. It's like a little mustard seed. It's like a hidden treasure. It's mixed in with the weed and the wheat. It's easy to miss it. And don't we all miss the blessings of God? Don't we all? In a single day, how often miss the presence of God, the signs of God's presence? How often do we miss and overlook the joy that gives us, and the joy of life itself?

Someone has written, “The paradox of our generation is we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways but narrower minds, bigger houses but smaller families, more conveniences but less time, more degrees and less common sense, more information but less wisdom. We have multiplied our possessions but reduced our values. These are times of fast foods and slow digestion, steep profits and shallow relationships. And Christ comes along saying, “The wonder of God, the love of God, it is near. It is in your daily life. I please, please don't miss it!” I think that's why coming for the Eucharist on the weekend is so important because what happens, number one, we have to slow down. We have to focus our attention. We gather with other people who are kind of looking in the same direction and we hear something of the word of the Lord. We take simple bread and wine, blessed, and know that the Christ of our God is present among us so that we can give thanks and maybe change a little. Change ourselves, maybe change our world. We are called, Jesus, to notice, to notice the Kingdom of God. And our reaction, I think, should be awe, just awe, reverence and respect, and then what do I do about it? If you unpack that, that's quite a bit. What do I do about it? We are called to love and to compassion. We are called to forgiveness so that we are not like a broken record. We don't give up somewhere but we let go and move on with forgiveness and we try to make a difference.

That's a real big job! And we have the whole world and the universe to be aware of, and to be concerned to notice so that we experience awe and we take some kind of action. But, like the little mustard seed, like little yeast, like the scattered good seed, we begin with very tiny, small steps. We all walk out of here, heading beginning again with small steps. Someone wrote, after 9/11, “Remember to spend some time with your loved ones because they are not going to be around forever. Remember to say a kind word to someone who looks to you in awe because that little person will soon grow up and leave your side. Remember to give a warning to those near you because that is the only treasure you can give with your heart and it doesn't cost a cent.”

Jesus, in example after example, invites us to notice the goodness of God in our world and in one another's care, to experience awe before the presence of God, as near as our own hearts, and to make a difference in the lives of those around us. Remember life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that we give our breath away. Let us notice that God is near and let us give thanks to the Lord who is so good. Amen.