



Come and See!

February 4, 2018

The Word...

“Although I am free in regard to all, I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible....

To the weak I became weak, to win over the weak.

I have become all things to all, to save at least some.

All this I do for the sake of the gospel,
so that I too may have a share in it.”

(from 1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23)

Pondering the Word ...

“I have become all things to all to save at least some.” Oh, Paul, here we go again!

As he writes in several of his letters, his only boast is that of the gospel, but at times, I find that boasting a bit over the top. When we read St. Paul’s letters, it’s important to balance his “big” talk with all the instances when he calls to light his imperfections and weaknesses. I think of Paul as someone who has reformed (which of course, he has). Those who find the strength to overcome a harmful addiction or develop a healthy habit are often the most vocal spokespersons for their particular life change. That’s exactly what Paul does. He has come to know Christ and now there’s no stopping him!

But he takes it one step further. In marketing terms, Paul “knows his audience.” He says “To Jews, I became like a Jew to win over the Jews; to ones outside the law, I became as one outside the law; to the weak I became weak...” It’s not that Paul is disingenuous or inconsistent with the message of the gospel. He just recognizes the different mindsets and attitudes of those to whom he preaches. He is in effect able to speak their language, and in doing so, is better able to teach and defend the gospel and share his faith in Christ.

Living the Word...

I attended a retreat not long ago with the author and social justice advocate, Edwina Gately. She told a story about her first experience as a missionary in Africa. I love how she described it; to paraphrase, she said: ‘I was all ready to leave England and take my God with me to Africa. Imagine my surprise when I arrived, that I found God already there.’

Over the centuries, missionaries have been guilty of imposing Western images and practices on indigenous peoples and destroying cultures, rather than finding the essential truths we hold in common. Even today, missionaries and people who work in social justice settings can fail to recognize God already present and active in those they serve. As Pope Francis tells us, we draw people to Christ, not by proselytizing, but by “attraction.” This goes for people of other faiths and traditions, those we serve, even our kids and family members. Do we need to be like St. Paul, all things to all people? No, but by being ourselves and welcoming others with joy and understanding, we may just be able to demonstrate the love of Jesus, who is, by the way, Paul, the only one who can save them! ☺

Personal Reflections and Ideas: _____

Feb 5: *“Advance, O LORD, to your resting place.”* (Ps 132)

This is an expression we don't hear very often, an image that may seem foreign: God taking a rest. We hear God rested on the seventh day of creation, but ever since Adam and Eve's colossal blunder, God hasn't had a moment's peace! How might we be able to give God a breather? Each time we reach out in love to comfort another, to feed one of God's poor, to care for God's world, it is one miniscule weight lifted from God's burden. As we get closer to Lent, think about it as helping Jesus shoulder his cross. Imagine if everyone would do this--maybe God could get a bit of shut-eye. He may not need it, but Lord knows, he surely deserves it!

Feb 6: *“How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God!”* (Ps 84)

This psalm is entitled, “Prayer of a Pilgrim to Jerusalem,” and celebrates the Israelites' annual pilgrimages to God's glorious temple in Jerusalem. But as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians: *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* (3:16) We are lovely too. Not without imperfections--squeaky doors, drafty windows, loose tiles, and dark corners. But yes, we are lovely dwelling places of the Lord! Let us be a welcoming beacon to pilgrims in search of peace.

Feb 7: *“The mouth of the just murmurs wisdom.”* (Ps 37)

The translation I use chooses the word “murmurs” to represent the Hebrew word for “soliloquizes,” which basically means talking to yourself. It is differentiated from other meanings of murmur as used in Exodus when the Israelites grumble in the desert or in Isaiah, when there is gossip going around. I like the image this translation portrays. It makes me consider the importance of practicing what I preach. If I consider myself to be just and righteous, I darn well better make sure I am being wise in what I say and do. Perhaps it's a good idea to start each day by giving ourselves a good talking to: “I will try to be compassionate and nonjudgmental today.” “I will demonstrate my faith by speaking out when I see injustice, but in calm, merciful ways.” Beginning the day with a conscious commitment to love and quietly reminding ourselves throughout the day is a sure sign that we *are* wise and walk in the company of God.

Feb 8: *So the LORD said to Solomon: “Since this is what you want, and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes which I enjoined on you, I will deprive you of the kingdom and give it to your servant.”* (1 Kgs 11:4-13)

“Yo, Solomon. What happened to all that wisdom, buddy? You were wise when you judged the people of Israel, but not so wise when it came to yourself. Did all the riches go to your head? Maybe you thought the rules didn't apply to you. And you made the biggest mistake of all: you didn't heed your father's advice, admit your sins, and ask for God's mercy, the mercy that was always there for dear old dad. So God assumed worshipping those idols was exactly you wanted since that's what you kept right on doing.” Do the things of this world blind me and cause me to forget God? What things do I fail to recognize and repent?

Feb 9: *(Jesus) said, “Ephphatha!” (that is, “Be opened!”) Immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment removed, and he spoke plainly.* (Mk 7:31-37)

I wonder how long this man has suffered from deafness. Chances are his speech impediment is related to his hearing loss. We learn that at Jesus' command, he is able to speak plainly. Or put another way, he finds his voice. He regains his dignity. He leaves behind the status as an outcast. The gospels tell us stories of miraculous cures, but we shouldn't overlook the *healing* that occurs as well. The sick, the poor, the elderly, the mentally ill—people who, because of their lot, often have no voice. We can be like Jesus, helping those who suffer regain their dignity and find their voice. “Ephphatha.” Be open to being as Christ to others.

Feb 10: *Jeroboam thought: “The kingdom will return to David's house...the hearts of the people will return...and they will kill me.” The king made two calves of gold...and priests from among the people.”* (1Kgs12:26-32; 13:33-34)

Jeroboam is Solomon's servant who, due to Solomon's sin, is given the kingship of ten tribes of Israel. He's worried about his own survival, so what does he do? He sins as well, surrounding himself with idols and with people who are not qualified to perform the roles they are given. (No political comment here!) He doesn't learn the lesson Solomon's downfall could teach him, just like we often fail to learn from mistakes, our own or those of others. The humorist Sam Levenson quipped, “You must learn from other people's mistakes. You can't possibly live long enough to make them all yourself.” I ask myself, “What lessons might I be missing right now?”