

Wakefulness

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Mark 9:38-48

You hopefully recall last week's conversation

between Jesus and the disciples about who is "the greatest".

(I realize that last Sunday may seem like two months ago....)

This is the conversation that follows.

I have to admit that, upon first reading,

it may seem like randomly juxtaposed thoughts.

Jesus goes from speaking of those not against him

to those who give his disciples a cup of water

to the disciples' hands and feet and eyes.

It is not a logical discourse. What is the connection?

The apparent randomness suggests a lack of coherence

on the part of the gospel writer or perhaps Jesus Himself.

Well, let us presume that Jesus is rather coherent (!).

And let us presume that, somehow

—beyond literary complexity and the gospel writer's "shortcomings",

there is a coherence to be uncovered.

The disciples approach Jesus with a very legitimate concern.

There is this other person—not a member of the group of disciples,

who is performing exorcisms.

What is the deal? Only Jesus and the disciples do this, do they not?

They are worried about membership in and allegiance to the "Jesus club".

What does Jesus say?

Jesus radically expands their definition, their vision of belonging to Him.

He tells them that one cannot perform a mighty deed in relation to Him,

and, at the same time, be against Him.

In fact, Jesus declares that anyone not explicitly against Him is for Him.

Wait a minute: there is a difference between

being *for* someone and being "*not against*" someone, is there not?

I can *not* be *against* a particular politician,

but not necessarily be *for* him/her.

Well, there is something new, something different when it comes to Jesus.

Jesus is suggesting that those not explicitly against Him are for Him

—*whether they know it or not.*

In other words,
Jesus can touch and make use of *any* human heart further to love the world.
Jesus, the God-man, holds everyone in the palm of His hand,
save those who consciously ask not to be held—and even then...
Of course, if we consciously ask *to be* held, greater intimacy ensues.

Jesus then speaks of those
who “give a cup of water” to the disciples because they belong to Christ.
As kind as they may be, according to the disciples,
they too are not (yet) in the Jesus club.
According to Jesus, however, they *are* in the club
 (“these little ones who believe”).
In fact, they are very precious to Jesus,
and the disciples have an immense responsibility in their regard.

Do you see what Jesus is doing?
Jesus is sensitizing the disciples to His presence,
there where they know not He is.
Jesus is revealing His presence where they perceive it not,
and revealing those who, by virtue of His presence, belong to Him.

Jesus then speaks to the disciples about *their* belonging to Him.
They should be somewhat ready for him to speak intensely
of the absolute primacy and intensity of such relationship.

1. because Jesus has already spoken of complete yielding in love
as the condition of discipleship (in the previous chapter).
2. because the sensitivity to His presence that Jesus has awakened
normally leads to *zeal*, and *zeal* implies readiness.

Jesus speaks of the absolute primacy and intensity of relationship with Him
by using rather graphic metaphors to illustrate the elimination of
whatever keeps a person from “entering life”.

“Cut off your hand or foot if need be, pluck out your eye.”

It is not a literal directive! It is an intense expression whereby Jesus
suggests that relationship with God is worth more than anything.

Jesus reveals that *holiness* is greater than *wholeness*.
Missing hands or feet or eyes is a lack of wholeness—*obviously!*
Beyond human wholeness
—which is a good thing and for which we all strive—
there is *holiness*, there is the purity of divine love,
there is relationship with the Source of all love,
 which is fulfillment that wholeness cannot give
 which is fulfillment that we cannot give ourselves.
And sometimes, we must eliminate certain things that entangle us
—because of fragility or selfish tendencies, to enter this Divine relationship.
Jesus wants to give us more than the whole world
and invites us to

- incredible wakefulness of mind and heart
- to great sensitivity to and zeal for God’s presence
- to the deep conviction that God is, in the end, everything

Is God my “everything”?
Or is God only my “Sunday thing”?
If so, I can and ought to say it—in utter simplicity.
**“God I am not there yet. Please bring me to that place.
By myself, it probably won’t work. My to-do list gets in the way.
My fatigue gets in the way. My doubts get in the way.
My past disappointments with you get in the way.
But I *will* to trust. But I will trust.”**

Let us ask for such wakefulness. It is a gift.
Let us ask the Holy Spirit to move us.
Such wakefulness is also a *choice*.
Our relationship with God is indeed a response
 to unmerited initiatives on His part.
But the response is real, and really important.
For although we are all, in a sense, held in the palm of God’s hand,
because love presupposes freedom, if we freely yield to the holding,
 the spirit that was on Moses can rest on us all the more
 and greater intimacy and fulfillment—like none other—await us.

I close with a portion of a prayer by Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity,
a Carmelite nun who died at the age of 26 in 1906,
which expresses beautifully such yielding:

**Let nothing disturb my peace nor draw me forth from you,
O my unchanging God, but at every moment
may I penetrate more deeply into the depths of your mystery.
Give peace to my soul; make it your heaven,
your cherished dwelling-place and the place of your repose.**