

Fr. Charles Puthota's Blog

August 23, 2020

From the Pastor's Desktop



Dear Parishioners of St. Elizabeth,

Scripture Reflection - 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

An atheist quizzes his newly-converted Christian friend about Jesus. "Where was Jesus born? How many apostles did he have? Who were his parents? Where did he die?" The neophyte draws a blank to each question. Unimpressed, the atheist says, "You seem to know almost nothing about Jesus to whom you claim to have been converted." The friend answers: "I'm ashamed at how little I know about Jesus. However, some years ago I used to be abusive toward my own family and addicted to gambling and alcohol. But now I am completely free from those demons. All this Jesus has done for me. This much I know of him."

Who is Jesus to me? We Catholics at times may be thrown off by this direct challenge. We have our liturgies, sacraments, and devotions; we like to give to the poor and the needy; we love the Church and follow the traditions---all of which possess the power to bring us face to face with Jesus. However, often enough, we may not be engaged in finding a personal and communal relationship with Jesus, in a conscious and explicit manner, through all our religious practices and explore ways in which Jesus could become present in an ongoing way in our lives. Who do we say that Jesus is? Jesus himself is interested in this question.

Information about Jesus does not necessarily lead us to Jesus. The faith our parents, teachers, friends, priests, and nuns have passed on to us needs to become our personalized faith. We cannot live on borrowed truths. Truths have to become our way of life or we will be mouthing platitudes. Theories of food are all good, but we have to taste it for ourselves. Concepts of love are not enough. We need to actually love and be loved. Similarly, our faith calls for personal experience or it is not our faith. Jesus invites us to come and see---taste and see---for ourselves.

As individuals, families and communities, we face the question: Who is Jesus to us? People may have variously called him John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and one of the prophets. But who is Jesus to us, here and now, in our culture and society, in the 21st century, given our current issues like Covid and racial conflicts? The answer is bound to be dialogical as Jesus relates to our changing scenarios of life as we grow in age, facing all sorts of circumstances in our lives and the world.

Our authentic answers to Jesus' question can spring only from the Heavenly Father's revelation. Only through God's wisdom and knowledge, His inscrutable and unsearchable ways, which Paul celebrates in Romans, do we come to know His Son. We cannot define Jesus purely from culture and society, our wants and needs. There is a grave danger of domesticating Jesus to suit our needs and ideologies. True, he is incarnate in our times, culture, and the world as the Word-made-Flesh, but he is also counter-cultural, calling the world to conversion and judgment. He is the Son of God, our Savior, for all times and cultures. He is "the Christ, the Son of the living God," calling us to repentance and giving us eternal life. We cannot fabricate Jesus for our convenience; we cannot fashion our own idols of Jesus. Our personal experience of Jesus has to be rooted and grounded in the revelation of our Father. Letting Jesus be who he is, we discern his vital role in our lives and for the world.

As Peter is called to shepherd the Church, as Eliakim is appointed master of the house in Isaiah, we are sent out on mission in the wake of our personal experience of Jesus. With Jesus we will collaborate to let the Church shine and dispel the darkness of evil in the world. Who is Jesus to us? This question we cannot ignore as Christians. The answer---not merely in words, but in the way we live---will bind us together with Jesus and his Father, energizing us to heal the world, the world God cherishes with an everlasting love.

Father Charles Puthota, Ph.D.