

Connecting With the Sunday Readings

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

We are all invited to participate in the life of the Kingdom of God. Those who dedicate their lives to studying the Gospels tell us that the announcement of God's Kingdom began with the coming of Jesus. It is the central idea in all the Gospels. There was hope in the land of Israel that it would happen, but no one knew when. John the Baptist said it was immanent. Jesus said it was now! He was starting a new time, a revolution of possibilities; God was now active in Jesus.

But there was a major obstacle to people accepting this reality. On the surface of things, nothing seemed to change. Politics remained the same. Business in the Temple went on as before. There were no changes in the weather. So what's with this "Kingdom of God" talk that Jesus kept referring to? Was he making this up or was there a real change going on?

A Gospel Word for the Home Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus reprimands John for trying to stop a man who was using Jesus' name to expel demons. John did not want him to expel demons or use Jesus' name because he was not one of Jesus' followers. Jesus does not want the man stopped. He welcomes the man's healing actions, and sees them as a sign that he must live according to God's plan. Jesus sees the man as faithful because he cares about others.

The rest of today's Gospel reading is about personal sin as it refers to others and needs to be looked at through Jesus' response to John. If there is something in or about one's person that would lead others astray, they must be rid of it, no matter what the consequences.

Today's Gospel reading contains an idea of immense importance. The context shows the disciples' failure to understand that humans do not control life in God's Kingdom. God is in charge. We cannot control God's actions or power, but we can discern it even in "outsiders."

Thought for the Week

Clearly, this relates directly to the daily life of the home. How often do family members stand in the way of others doing God's work or using their gifts and talents because of envy or jealousy or "because we have never done it that way?" How often do the plans and hopes of younger children get squashed because older children or parents who think what they have planned is much more important, or just because "I am the parent" or "I am the oldest"?

The daily gestures of caring for each other are of great significance. The Kingdom of God happens when a parent spends a few extra minutes listening to an eight-year-old's account of what happened today on the playground or a teen's worry about an upcoming test when they would rather be doing something else. These are small things in the eyes of the world. But, huge in the eyes of God. The Kingdom of God is very down-to-earth.

Besides the Gospel's valuing of "little things," there is the wonderful story of Saint Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, who wrote about her "little way" of practicing her faith. She lived an obscure life. But in the Church's wisdom, her life was recognized as one of great holiness. And it was given to the rest of us as an example of how to live a life of holiness in the midst of doing "little things for God."

Appreciating the importance of ordinary acts of kindness and concern requires extra attention to the daily flow of our lives. Because there's no applause, no public recognition of value and perhaps hardly a notice on the part of those we care for, we're prone to dismiss ourselves and what we do each day as hardly worth a notice. It's just what we do or what we have to do. No big deal. But is it? Taking this week's Gospel reading at face value along with many other things that Jesus said, look again. We may be living in the midst of greatness, and the little things we do in love are the clues to that greatness.

—by David Thomas, PhD, Co-Director, The Bethany Family Institute

Parent Survival

We can do almost anything if we think it's very important. However we sometimes are not aware of what that is. If it is associated with money, we notice. If we receive the plaudits of others, we receive the kind of response we want. But what if there's no applause and no extra affirmation outside our own valuing of what we have done?

That's the point of today's Gospel reading: to help us recognize what's really important. It brings us to look at our lives and its various activities from the perspective of God. God wants us to live and to help each other live. Live and help live. This doesn't involve earth-shaking activities. Most of us live fairly ordinary lives. No matter. That's exactly as God wants it. Little things done by little people constitute the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Car or Meal Talk

Talk about one "little thing" you each did for another during the last week.

One-Line Prayer

Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see the little things you value. Amen.