

NO GREATER GIFT

The Scottish poet Robert Burns once wrote a little piece of doggerel:

*There is no greater gift He gie us (gives us),
Than to see ourselves as others see us.*

How do others see us? Specifically, how do others see you? Do you know the answer to that? How do others see you? And why would Burns say that it is the greatest of gifts for us to have that knowledge? Because others see us more truly than we see ourselves often enough. And if the others he is referencing are those who love us then there is no greater gift than that we get to see ourselves through the authentic eyes of another's love.

And if that love belongs to God? How does God see us? How does God see you? How does God see me? Look at the first reading today from Exodus. The Ten Commandments. This is from a long time ago. About 3200 years. God calls Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees some time about 1900 years before Christ. Pope Francis is actually there right now and the first Pope ever to have visited the birthplace of Abraham our father in faith. It is in present day Iraq.

Some seven hundred years later after Moses has led the Hebrew people out of their slavery in Egypt, God gives to Moses on Mount Sinai what we call the Ten Commandments. The first three refer to our relationship to God: No other Gods, no false gods, no man-made gods; great respect for the very name and identity of God; attention to and prayer on the Lord's day. The last seven deal with other relations with each other. No lying. No stealing. No killing. No lusting. No coveting another person or other's possessions.

God waits seven hundred years before he codifies his mandates to those he has chosen. Seven hundred years is a long time. Time enough to get a sense for these Chosen People. God sets the minimal standard for human behavior. That is how God sees us. God sees how we human beings are acting. God sees where we tend to get messed up. God sets reminders before us. God does this because that is the way He sees us. And God wants the best for us.

Saint Paul speaks of a very human attitude that he encountered some twelve hundred years after Moses. Among Jews, they are like the people from Missouri whose license plate pronounces those people as being from the "Show Me" State. So some of us human beings are like that. Show me. Prove it. In those moments we are fond of finding reasons not to believe. But there are others who are always pretty skeptical setting a very high bar for their expecting to be impressed. When we do this we number ourselves among those who are quick to find the flaws and critique the presentation as being superficial and shallow. Just a bunch of foolishness. Paul says that all he has is the person of Jesus Christ and him crucified and risen.

Then there is today's gospel. Jesus goes on a tear in the Temple. The Temple is to be a place of prayer, holiness, humility, gratitude. Instead it has become yet another marketplace with

its own level of corruption. Jesus has observed this for years. On this day he has had it. It is time for the cleansing to happen. A homemade cord of whips and the animals are driven out and the money changers table are turned upside down. He does no physical harm to any person. But you can just imagine people scattering and scurrying and trying to grab up their coins. Jesus is right on. He sees how these merchants and Temple officials really are. They of course do not see themselves this way. So who sees truly? *There is no greater gift He gie us...* In this case and in all cases, Jesus is the One who sees truly, who sees with love. AND who always wants only the best for us.

All of that as background for us and for today. How does the Lord see us—right now? See me right now? See each of you right now? See our nation right now? See our world right now? What are the common attitudes on display everywhere today? Attitudes of righteousness and superiority, especially in the world of politics. What about accusations of all kinds in the world of our racial relationships? What about all the angry resentments and finger-pointing and accusations? What about the way we disregard what is the truth and substitute what we want to be reality? What about the rampant “Me and mine first” attitude even in the world of the coronavirus?

What about the way we have re-written the sexual understanding of us as human beings, disregarding the design of our Creator God and writing a vision that conforms to what we want it to be? What about that unbridled attitude of taking and piling up for ourselves more than a fair share of this world’s goods and resources? What about our envy that tears at and destroys the goodness of others we hate? My friends, we do not do all of these things. But we do some of them. And maybe several of them.

So. You and I are temples of the Holy Spirit. And we have allowed some of these poisonous attitudes to enter in and attach themselves to our souls. If you were God, and you observed that, what would you do if you encountered these kinds of attitudes? Would you try to purify us? I believe—yes. How? Well, first off God would have to get our attention so that we actually recognize some of these things that we are often blind to in ourselves. He would have to get our attention like with an angry outburst, a whip made out of cords, overturned tables, stampeding animals? Yes, like that.

And today? How would God try to get our attention so we can be cleansed after we recognize how out of sync we are? What would it take to get the attention of every person in the world so that they would be open to how God sees them, their attitude and actions? And do something that would have a worldwide effect? You mean, something like what is happening right now everywhere in the world? Would the Lord allow a deadly virus? Does the Lord use something like this virus to get our attention? Hoping that we would eventually begin to see that our danger is not so much from the virus we can fight and conquer but from our sin to which we have grown comfortable. If this Lent isn’t about real stuff, then it is a waste of time, no matter how much fasting, and almsgiving and prayer we do. And my friends, are you beginning to sense that we may be running out of time? Will you let the Lord in to cleanse your inner temple? Will I? *Than to see ourselves as The Other sees us.*

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.