

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year: B

Wis 1.13-15; 2.23-24; Ps 29(30); II Cor 8.7,9,13-15; Mk 5.21-43 or 5. 21-24, 35-43

Barking Dog

On a Communion round I did many years ago there was an elderly housebound couple. Their house had a wrought iron fence with a sign "Beware of Dog" and each time I pressed the button ferocious barking would explode from inside the house. A young man would come out and ask me to wait while he put the dog in the bedroom and then I could go in. I took Communion there for 9 months but never once saw the dog. There was a photo in the lounge room though of a beautiful German Shepherd.

Towards the end of my time there I said to the lady of the house 'Your dog must be very ferocious.' She answered "Not really. She's a very nice dog; it's just that she's afraid".

I thought to myself 'The dog is afraid?' By the sound of the barking one would never have guessed. But then I got to thinking a little more deeply. To be perfectly honest, I had to admit to myself, some of my fiercest barking is caused by fear. It's a trait we humans share with the animal kingdom, like the hair that stands up on animals to make them appear larger, our growls are often caused by fear.

Fear wears many disguises and it's usually difficult to identify in others and almost impossible to recognize and admit to in ourselves.

Think about it for a moment. Question yourself about why you say no to things. What disturbs you about others? Why you dislike certain changes? Why are there certain things you don't do?

Multifaceted Fear

Fear takes as many forms as there are human situations and, as I have already said it often disguises itself, like in that Alsatian dog, as aggression.

Rejection

Well, let's look at the Gospel. At first sight you would think the townspeople in the gospel had taken leave of their senses. They recognize the wisdom of Jesus' words, they admit to the miraculous nature of his deeds, and then, strangely, they reject him. How very contradictory?

They have the evidence of greatness before them but they cannot bring themselves to accept it. What is the explanation for this startling state of affairs?

Listen again to the townspeople's complaint: *This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?* And they would not accept him.

Do you see how they are arguing for the familiar, the known, the comfortable. They are rehearsing to themselves what they know, or think they know, about Jesus, what they are comfortable with.

Rejection of His Followers

This very night a visiting priest told me about how his decision to become a priest was very disturbing to some of the members of his family. To use his own words: *it changed the tone of their conversation, and they didn't altogether appreciate it.*

Paradox - Change

Other vocations to the priesthood or to the religious life have caused similar major disruptions in families, particularly non-believing, or non-Catholic

families. Imagine a non-believing family suddenly having Catholic priest in its midst; it changes everything for everyone, and not everyone appreciates being 'redefined' without their permission, so to speak.

Dog Was Afraid

Returning to our German Shepherd for a moment I think she too, like most territorial dogs, resented the intrusion of an unknown person into the status quo of her family circle; it spelled danger.

No Fear in Jesus

For the townspeople of Jesus hometown to accept his wisdom and his miraculous gifts would mean having to accept a number of other things as well, not the least of which is a new 'pecking order' in the social arrangements. They would have had to accept that they had somehow been blind to the prophet in their midst and to admit this to one another. I think they were afraid of doing that. The very way they seem to insist on what they know about Jesus shows their discomfort, and I believe it was discomfort to the point of fear; fear of the unknown.

Our Daily Fears

There are many things we do, and refuse to do, out of fear. Beginning a real prayer life is perhaps one of the most common. To become a person of real prayer is to bring about a radical definition of one's life and values.

God be My Shield

God must be my shield to defend myself from the attacks of the enemy. Giving up smoking or alcohol does the same thing. When someone gives up smoking at age thirty remembers thinking he/she would never be happy again. With alcohol it's even worse, apparently. Many alcoholics report that they don't give up because they don't know how they would deal with all those hours in a day if they were sober; it would require becoming an entirely new person, and for many that is just too frightening to contemplate. In such cases God can be their strength. This requires constant appeals to God to be their shield.

All this leaves us with the question: *What am I afraid of beginning or of leaving behind in order to become the kind of person I know I am really called to be?*

Recently the Gospel has spoken of the demons who went into the pigs and caused them to die. The townspeople were so frightened by this they asked Jesus to leave the district! Can you imagine! They asked the one person who could bring them salvation - to leave! We do like our ***status quo***, don't we?

Practical Conclusion

“Do not be afraid!” says God’s word all throughout human history. “Do not be afraid!” **Fear lowers our horizons and keeps us trapped in the familiar and safe, as we see in the people of Jesus' hometown.** He could work no miracles there. But we know that faith and love cast out fear.