

LOOKING BEYOND

A—Prejudice blocks our vision. It can stop us from seeing who is before us but it can also block our spiritual vision, to see how God is at work. Prejudice holds us back from looking beyond.

1—Usually we think of people being prejudiced against the stranger, against someone who is different, against what they don't know.

2—But there's another kind of prejudice, this prejudice involves not those that we don't know but those that we *do know*.

3—In the gospel today Jesus encounters this second type of prejudice. People have hard time accepting him not because he is unknown but because he *is* known. They don't let Jesus out of the box in which they have put him. But maybe they don't know him as well as they think they do.

4—They're astonished at what Jesus says. They speak of his wisdom and his mighty deeds. They're on the verge of getting it right but they can't quite get there.

5—It's as if they're on the threshold of belief but then their prejudice kicks in and they can't make it. Prejudice blocks their spiritual vision and their faith.

B—Last week the gospel gave two strong examples of faith in Jairus, the synagogue leader whose daughter was dying and in the named woman suffering from a hemorrhage who touches Jesus' cloak.

1—This week by contrast we see a lack of faith. We see faith being blocked by prejudice.

2—Now it's easy to criticize the people of Nazareth. But we too can become too comfortable with the Jesus we know or rather the Jesus we think we know. We can try to put him in a box and that prejudice of familiarity can kick into our lives and it can block our vision and our faith.

C—This gospel holds within it a double surprise.

1—The people of Nazareth are *astonished* at Jesus but Jesus is *amazed* at their lack of faith.

2—There's a rather shocking statement that Jesus could not many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith.

3—Pope Benedict once remarked, *Christ's miracles are not a display of power but signs of the love of God that is brought into being wherever it encounters reciprocated human faith.* Elsewhere Jesus speaks of faith that's the size of a mustard seed. Even a small amount of faith can make a difference.

4—Their prejudice not only blocked their faith; it blocked God working in their lives; it blocked God possibly doing mighty deeds in their lives.

5—And again, there's a lesson in that for all of us on how we can tune out God in our own lives.

D—This all points to the importance of faith in our own lives.

1—There's the faith *by which* we believe the *how* and the faith *in which* we believe, the *what*.

2—Faith is both believing and also trusting.

3—God want to help us but God respects our freedom and so often requires that there be some sort of faith or trust on our part.

4—Perhaps there are some miracles Jesus is offering to us but we closed off to either by our prejudice or our lack of faith.

E—All that points to a problem we've all faced. What happens when we don't get what we want?

1—There are many people, who truly believe, truly trust, who truly have faith and yet despite the depth of their prayer, they don't get that for which they prayed.

2—Was there something wrong with them? Did they not just pray hard enough, try hard enough, desire it enough?

3—Well, no; not necessarily. Prayer isn't a mechanical science but a mystical science. Or to put it more bluntly, God isn't a vending machine, a short order cook or a genie.

F—Exhibit A for all this is found in the second reading.

1—St. Paul gets deeply personal, he speaks of this mysterious thorn in the flesh.

2—Now I think we can safely say that St. Paul was a man of deep faith and trust in God. St. Paul had faith but despite the depth of his faith; despite three times asking God to take it away, God didn't allow it to happen.

3—Was there something wrong with St. Paul? Was his faith deficient?

4—Or, perhaps God’s wisdom was at work in a way that St. Paul couldn’t understand at first but *because of his faith*, eventually he was able to understand, that God was at work and that God could work through Paul’s weakness.

5—Sometimes our strengths can be a greater obstacle to God’s work than our weaknesses.

6—So what do we do when despite faith, we pray for something and we don’t get it? The answer is that we continue on in faith and in trust in God’s wisdom which is beyond us and, in our weakness, realizing our dependence upon God, we might be able to begin to say with St. Paul, *when I am weak, then I am strong*.

7—We don’t know for sure what St. Paul’s thorn in the flesh was. It may have been a physical ailment. Perhaps it was another person or an interior struggle.

a—Maybe it’s better that we don’t know because in one way or another, we all have a thorn in the flesh, some sort of struggle that we’ve dealt with, perhaps for years, that we’ve prayed for God to take away and it’s still here.

b—We continue to pray about it but we continue to trust in God’s wisdom that can work even in our weakness. Perhaps there’s a different type of miracle God wants to work in our lives

F—As we celebrate the Eucharist, we enter into the hour of Jesus’ greatest weakness and helplessness. That was also the hour of his triumph that would ultimately, include his resurrection.

1—Here we renew our faith and here Jesus strengthens our faith.

2—Here we ask for the grace to look beyond both the prejudice of what’s different and the prejudice of what’s familiar, asking that neither will ever block our vision of Jesus and how God is at work in our lives.

3—Here with lives of intentional faith we strive to persevere even when we don’t get that for which we pray.

4—May we have faith for whatever miracle Jesus may want to work in our lives, even if it’s the type of miracle we don’t expect.

5—With eyes of faith, may we always look to Jesus.

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