

The Glory of Jesus

I have a book that gently pokes fun at the Church. In it there is a wonderful little cartoon of a Bishop, dressed in his cope and mitre, standing tall and dignified, but the Bishop is not really standing tall and dignified, he is crawling out the back of the vestments while they stand tall in his place! It wittily contrasts the persona and the person. The persona is tall and dignified, the person is scared and a bit befuddled. How often our leaders present to us, within the church and outside it, a persona that does not match their person. Called to be shepherds of the flock, they are less than what they are called to be. A gentle chiding it is, however, because we know that none of us is perfect. There is a crack in everything, says Leonard Cohen.

But there is no crack in Jesus. In today's Gospel lesson from John 10:11-18 Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is not like the hired hand, who is less than what he is called to be, and who in the day of trouble does not protect. Jesus will lay down His life for His sheep. He has other sheep to bring into the fold, people of other lands, other traditions, other histories, and other races. He will make one flock of them all. And how will He do this? By the divine love by which He will lay down His life, and by the divine power by which He will take it up again. He is the perfect shepherd.

Today we look at the glory of Jesus' life. It is the perfect example, the inspiration for our living, the recreation of Humanity in holiness and perfection. He is the one who overcomes what the first Adam did, redeeming everything, making of it something greater than before. His ultimate care for us is cancelling the debt of our sin. Now He no longer need look at us in shame or us to Him. All He desires is reconciliation and redemption.

What in the world does that mean? The glory of Jesus reconciles us to God. This past week President Obama addressed the nation about the swine flu. He said it was cause for concern, but not for alarm. Appropriate action, he felt, was being taken to protect us.

Swine flu is a problem. It can make you very sick, it can even kill you, and as an epidemic it can spread very quickly to lots of people. But let's put the current situation in perspective: Mexico City reported 20 deaths--among 27 million people. That's one in every 1,350,000 people. That is less than one in the whole city of Dallas, Texas. You have to see swine flu as a motivation to action, but not the consuming focus. In the same way, we sometimes feel guilty for the hurtful things we do or the good we fail to do. The guilt is not the consuming focus, it is the motivation to action. The final outcome Jesus always seeks is reconciliation. Clinging to your guilt when Jesus has forgiven you is to believe that your feelings are stronger than Jesus' grace. The glory of Jesus is that He forgave you on the Cross. Let go of your feelings of guilt, return to the glory of relationship with Him, and with His people.

The glory of Jesus shows us the truth of who we are called to be. There is a glitch on my computer. Whenever I get stumped on a sermon illustration the game of solitaire magically appears on my computer screen. In a matter of milliseconds I get sucked into time-wasting frivolity. Someone, though, had mercy on me and explained the situation: It is when I need time to let my creative juices flow that the game appears. It knows that the mindless muddling of my conscious thought needs to be suitably distracted so that the real work can go on beneath the surface. Ah, to have such a friend who truly understands these things! Truth be told, there is a glitch in our understanding of ourselves. We think of ourselves as moral agents in a world that is anything from supportive to antagonistic, and it is our duty to choose the good and avoid the evil for our eternal destiny depends on it. But the context is really much, much bigger than that. We are moral agents in a supportive world, who have made evil choices and been alienated from God, from one another and from the earth around us. The consequence is moral death in this life and eternal death in the next. But God sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us, so that we could be reconciled to Him. Now the alienation need not separate, and we are freed to live into what we are intended to be, which is agents of reconciliation. We are intended to manage the universe so

as to bring people into reconciliation with God, themselves and with the created order. We are intended to have dominion over a reconciled creation.

The glory of Jesus joins us to the community of God. This past Christmas we had a chance to go back to my ancestral home of Indiana to visit family. Many of Karisse's family live in the area, and we spent many good hours with them. In my mind we made the trip to see Karisse's family, but it is really my ancestral home. We got to spend time with my brother and several cousins and aunts. When I got there the greater context of my extended family became apparent to me. The human race has an undiscovered family. We were created by the loving interaction of the Trinity. The fellowship of that eternal and perfect communion is our destiny. Life on earth is a process of discovering that family. It's potential is all the people of the earth, plus all the rest of the created order. Within it lies buried the wonders of a family whose beginning is before time and whose end is in eternity. It begs the questions:

- Who are my brothers and my sisters?
- To whom do I belong?
- How do I treat family members, those I have by virtue of their creation—which is all of the created order? And those I have by virtue of their redemption—those of the household of God in Jesus Christ?

In other words, how do I live out the reconciliation that God has granted me in Jesus Christ in my relationships with all the rest of the world?

The glory of Jesus is truly a remarkable thing. It has the power to order our relationships, reveal our potential, and empower our future. Let us worship Him in spirit and in truth, not just on Sundays, but in how we treat one another and the rest of the created order.