

Homily for the 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 22-23, 2018

Readings: Wisdom 2:12, 17-20; James 3:16-4:3; Mark 9:30-37

Preacher: Sue Howard

One of my friends, a Catholic Worker, told me that even though she has lived with the poor for several years it will take much longer to really know what it means to be poor. She was looking forward to becoming more and more empty, more reliant on God, less reliant on the things of this world—the things we think bring us joy. She is learning how to order her desires to be more God-centered. She finds peace there.

Recently I have also experienced a conversion of heart. It has led me to a deeper respect and desire for humility. For two years I visited a man who had been in an institution for over 50 years. There was very little I could “do” for this man who was severely disabled. He collected old movies and read the paper, following the baseball teams so we talked about those things. Mostly he spoke about his desire to be able to do normal things. He wished he could have had a job, mixed a drink for a lady, climbed a ladder, flown a plane, eaten a steak or a myriad of other normal experiences he never had. I was at a loss on how to have a pastoral or prayerful relationship with him. One day I finally realized that I was not ministering to him, but he to me. He was showing me the poverty of humility. This experience has made me rethink what it means to simply be human.

Another person I visit lives in a world of deafness and intellectual poverty,

having always lived with people who told her what to do. Now in her 80s and alone she has very little understanding of how money works or how to manage her life. In every encounter I learn more from her about how she gets by and how the grace of God has sustained her and protected her and sent kind people to help her along the way. I cannot make her life perfect, but day-by-day through prayer and community support we work together to try to make sense out of the chaos of her poverty.

Through these experiences I am coming to understand the verses from James, that teach us:

“Where there is jealousy and selfish ambition come disordered desires.” To desire God things is a spiritual growth process that happens when we find ourselves in God situations that seem foreign to us, or out of our realm of reality. These situations can teach us that it is not through our own power, or our own thinking and fixing and manipulating that good fruits are grown. Those fruits come when we accept that we don’t know all the answers, when we realize that grace and peace and joy only come through God, when we enter into the fullness of humanity, which is what God did in Christ. Being fully human, being present to other people, not being caught up in the shallow values of this world or in the false joys of prosperity leads to a centeredness and a oneness with the wisdom of God that cannot be purchased.

Is this what Jesus was trying to show the disciples in today’s readings? Was he trying to open their hearts and minds to the possibilities that exist if they let go of their quest for power and supplant it with a desire for God’s

love of the poor and the vulnerable, like the child?

I find my own servant leadership has matured since I have stopped praying, “God what do you want me to do?” but rather, “God what are you showing me, what are you doing in this situation?” This prayer of discernment has yielded much more spiritual fruit and has filled my heart with peace.