

5th Sunday C.07

1. A week or so ago I went to a funeral home to lead the wake service. I was just about inside the door when a child of seven or eight years old accosted me, and I think I am using that word correctly here. To accost, the dictionary says, is to greet first, especially in an intrusive way. That is what this child did, for her opening words to me before I had said anything were: “Who are you?” I had a winter coat on and I don’t think my Roman collar was visible, but I don’t know if that would have made any difference anyway.

2. I was so taken back by her greeting that I did not respond in a polite way. I should have said something like: “I am the priest who is going to pray here,” or “I am Fr. Finnegan, and who are you?” Instead I said something like “You don’t greet people that way!” I hope I didn’t say more than that, but I cannot promise you I didn’t. Yes, I know, she was only seven years old or so. I shouldn’t be judging her by adult standards. On the other hand, shouldn’t even a seven-year old be a little better mannered than that? Or course I am rather stodgy in these matters. An adult neighbor shouted across the street at me the other day: “Hey, buddy, how you doin’?” “Great,” I think I answered, while wondering why his mother

didn't teach him better manners. He, no doubt, thought he was being friendly. I thought he was "accosting" me.

3. We have read in the paper recently about middle school children of our city being driven to school by their mothers to fight with each other. We have also read about children refusing to obey the orders of the police and even grabbing an officer from behind. This is even more than accosting the police, isn't it. All of this behavior adds up to a lack of reverence for other people. True, there are degrees of reverence, degrees of formality with others which change with situations and the ages of the people we are dealing with. Moreover, each of us has different norms, depending on our own upbringing and the ideas we embrace as adults. Yet, despite all these differences each of us has a bar below which we will not go. Each of us will say in some situation: "This is too much—or too little. This is offensive. I am not going to put up with this. I am not going to take this even from a child!"

4. What is the basis of such rude behavior? Reaching way, way back, I am going to say it is the result of a lack of reverence for God. A philosopher and a great novelist have said, "If there is no God, then all is allowable"? For if there is no God, and if we are just accidents of nature, then why should we respect each other?

We are just a chance reality which will disappear in a few years.

We are just a little bit of skin and bones.

5. Today's readings offer a different view of reality. Isaiah has an experience of the reality of God and it produces in him an awareness of his own sinfulness, of his own nothingness compared to God: "Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." The windows in our houses look clean until the sunlight hits them, and then we see how dirty they are. That is what happened to Isaiah when he saw God. He realized how sinful he was.

6. Peter has the same experience in today's Gospel. When he sees the miraculous catch of fish which Jesus has produced for him, he is aware of being in the presence of the holy and cries out: "Depart for me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

7. When we no longer reverence God, we don't recognize our own sinfulness and we become arrogant in our behavior towards others. On the other hand, when we experience God, we are aware of our sinfulness, and this creates a humility in us which makes us respect others.

8. Let us reverence each other. Married couples still have to reverence each other if their lives together are not to descend into a constant bickering and harping at each other. Children have to be taught to reverence others. If not, our schools will become jungles. We have to reverence others even if they are strangers. And, clearly, we have to reverence those who are our parents and siblings and friends. If we don't do that, we will have estranged families and friends.

9. Let us respect and reverence each other in word and gesture. Maybe we can learn from other cultures where signs of respect are more present, more obvious, than in our own. Reverence is the first attitude we must have towards God because God is God. It should also be the first attitude we should have in dealing with each other since we are the children of God, indeed, the brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We too are holy. We too should be revered.