

Sunday 14.09

Recently I met a fellow Jesuit whom I had not seen for many years. In our early years he was just one year ahead of me, but his later career took him to places like Iraq and Jordan, and I did not follow him there. He is one of those people who could be just about anything facially. He could pass for being an Indian or even Chinese. As we talked, he told me about meeting one of our teachers of many years ago, also a fellow Jesuit, and how this now very elderly Jesuit had begun to apologize to him for what he had done to him, that is, how he had failed him in the kind of intellectual training he had given him. But he stopped his former teacher and said to him, “Paul, you have made me what I am today.” He meant that positively. That is, he wanted to thank, not blame, this former teacher for all that he had taught him.

As you know, that is not always the case. Many of us blame our teachers and parents and the elders in our lives for having failed us. Sometimes we even want to take all our own shortcomings and lay them upon these other people’s shoulders. “It is not my fault that I failed here and there or that I didn’t do this or that, or that I have this problem with alcohol or with relating to my spouse or children,” people sometimes say. “It is all their fault, those who

molded me when I was young.” At times there is some truth to such statements. There are bad parents who leave awful scars on the souls of their children. There are bad teachers who do the same. But there ought to be a limit to this blaming of others. No matter what others have done to us negatively, ultimately we have to take responsibility for ourselves. We may have been given a bad rap, but the question ultimately becomes: “Yes, that is true. But what did you do with it?” All of us play with the hand that God has dealt us. All of us also play with the hand that those who formed us, parents and teachers, have dealt us. Maturity comes when we recognize that fact. Even greater maturity comes when we can forgive those who could have done better by us. How many of us can look back at our parents and say to ourselves: “For what they had to give, that is, for what they themselves had received, they gave to us very well. They did much better than they imagined that they could do.” And ultimate maturity comes then when we forgive them for their limitations, just as we hope other forgive us ours.

When we reach that point, we become God-like, Jesus-like. Paul-like. In our readings today we have examples of God the Father, Paul and the Lord Jesus forgiving others for their shortcomings. In the first reading God is sending the prophet Ezekiel to his own

people now in exile in Babylon. He forewarns Ezekiel that his audience, his fellow Jews in captivity, will be a hard nut to crack: “Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you,” God says to Ezekiel. “Then why do this?” we might ask God. And God’s answer would be: “Because I am obstinate in my love for them. They are going to learn that I am still talking to them, that I am still sending my prophets to them.”

Like God, Paul would not give up even when people beat him and sent him packing. In fact, at times he returned to the same towns to try again.

And Jesus? Look at Jesus in this Gospel. He returns to his hometown and its inhabitants are so offended that he has become so wise, so eloquent and so powerful in performing miracles that they are disgusted. “Who does he think he is?” they ask in indignation. “We know his family. They are no better than we are.”

Last week we learned that when Jesus performed a miracle, he felt it in himself because power went out from him. He was drained. What drained him, what caused this power to be drawn from him was the power of faith in the people who sought to be healed. In today’s Gospel we are told that Jesus could not perform many

miracles in his hometown. The power was not drained from him because there was no faith or very little faith in the people there. And look at the Lord's reaction to this situation: "He was amazed at their lack of faith." But, like his Father, he will not give up on them. He will call their lack of faith by its right name, but he will still persist in pursuing them, And yet we might marvel at his being so positive that he is amazed when he does not find faith. He really expected people to believe him.

Let us forgive those who have shortchanged us in any way. Let us not give up on ourselves, for God will not give up on us. The Lord Jesus expects us to believe him. Let us try to do so. Let us not disappoint him. May he not marvel at our lack of faith. Instead, let us continue to listen to what he asks of us. The race is not over yet. The Lord continues to speak to us. All we have to do is listen to him. That is to believe in Him. Indeed, our question to him must always be: "What now, Lord?"