

Sunday 26.09

Somewhere in the poems of Homer, the ancient Greek writer, in his Iliad or Odyssey, there is talk of an evil giant called Cyclops. The word cyclops is a combination of two Greek words, the word for wheel, kyklos, and the word for eye, ops. Thus the Cyclops was the wheeled or round-eyed one. He had just one eye in the middle of his head. But the word cyclops, let alone the reality, is not really part of our modern world. One would have to be a classicist, or at least to have been exposed to Greek in one's education, even to catch the reference. However, we still use another word like it, also from the Greek. We speak of people being myopic. I could not find the Greek root of this word. I believe it is a combination of the word one and the word eye. If so, it would refer to someone who has just one eye, someone, that is, like the ancient Cyclops. But I may be wrong. In any case, the dictionary gives the meaning of the word myopic as being nearsighted. A person suffering from myopia can see things which are near but cannot see things far away. The word myopic is also used in a metaphorical or analogous sense to refer to people who have little understanding or insight. They can only see what is right in front of them. They cannot take the long view of things. Only the near or close is clear; the distant is a blur.

When we look at today's Gospel, we can see two examples of myopia, of being able to see only what is very near. The first example is that of the disciples who are so nearsighted that they want the Lord to forbid a man from performing miracles in Jesus' name because he was not a member of their group. He was, we could say, too distant. They could not see him as belonging to their circle. But Jesus is not myopic. He tells them: "There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

This same myopia is also present in our first reading. Moses' assistant Joshua finds out that the spirit of prophecy has descended upon two men who were not present when this same Spirit came down upon seventy of them in one tent. The two men were supposed to be there as part of this select group of seventy, but for some reason they had been absent. Nevertheless they received the Spirit. But Joshua wants Moses to forbid them from exercising this gift. Moses, however, like the Lord, is not myopic. He tells Joshua: "Are you jealous for my sake ? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!"

“Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!” “For whoever is not against us is for us.” This non-myopic attitude, this ability to reach beyond what is near and to recognize a partner, a companion, in the distant one, this expansive view of the world is sometimes lacking in us as believers. We are too quick to divide people into two categories, those who are good, that is, those who are like us, and those who are evil, those who are not like us. Of course when we do that, we make enemies of non-enemies because we exclude them from our group and, as we see it, from the good ones of the world. What should we do instead? Following Moses and the Lord, we should embrace the distant one as being our possible friend, as being, as the Lord says, for us and not against us. And we must persevere in that attitude until the other person’s actions force us to conclude that this is not the case. But that can only come later. Our first attitude must be one of openness. We must be people of a generous heart, people willing to give others a chance to prove that they are friends, not foes.

In the second part of today’s Gospel we have another example of myopia. Since the nearsighted person can only see what is close up, his or her vision is restricted to one object at a time. In other words, the nearsighted person is also –and necessarily--the single-sighted person, the person who is totally concentrated on one

thing? Such concentration can be good or bad. A musical genius who is so dedicated to music that he or she neglects spouse and children is myopic in a bad sense. A saint who is totally dedicated to God and God's will and therefore does justice to all his or her human relationships is myopic in a good sense.

In this last part of today's Gospel Jesus embraces this last kind of myopia. Whatever prevents you from entering the Kingdom of God must be removed, even if it is your arm or eye. Jesus is here exaggerating to make his point, but the point is clear. We must be single-minded, single-hearted, single-sighted, myopic, in our devotion to God and God's will.

What do we want to see as primary in our lives? God, and God's will for us. Concretely, this comes down to the imitation of Jesus in our daily lives. If we can be myopic in this way, that is, if we can see Jesus as primary and everything else as having or not having a place in our lives, depending on whether it fits with our vision of him, then all will be well with our lives. If we fail to do that, there will be disorder and even chaos in our lives.

Therefore our prayer should always be that of the blind man in the Gospel (Mk 10:51). Jesus asked him: “What do you want me to do for you? The blind man replied to him, ‘Master, I want to see.’”