

Mark 1: 20-39 Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

It is all about relationship

Before anything else, our faith, is all about a relationship; a relationship between God and ourselves. If we do not have some kind of connection with our creator, **nothing** regarding our beliefs really makes any sense.

In today's Old Testament reading, Isaiah describes this God who we are to love and worship. He vividly makes clear that this God stretches out the heavens like a curtain, He is mighty in power, and He is the everlasting god, the Creator of the ends of the earth." If this was the only understanding we had of God it would be incredibly bold of us to try to develop **any** kind of relationship, never mind an intimate and personal one.

Yet when we read St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Paul is saying that he is **so** compelled to preach this gospel of love and forgiveness that he will do whatever he has to do to be able to tell everyone he comes in contact with about the Good News. He knew that the privilege to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ was its own reward. Paul is well aware of the grandeur of God, but he is **enraptured** with the love that Jesus Christ proclaimed and offered to all mankind.

St. Paul was incredibly passionate about telling the world about the Good News. And it is quite evident that the solid foundation he had which gave him the

strength he needed to stand firm during incredible times of trial was the love that he had for God. St. Paul's, and all the apostles, love for Jesus and His message is unquestionable. That love burning within them is the only viable explanation for their willingness to suffer, be ridiculed, and ultimately die in order to spread the gospel message.

Today's gospel reaffirms the importance of having a relationship with God. There is a lot of activity taking place on that day. Jesus cures Simon's mother-in-law, later that evening, Mark who tends to exaggerate, tells us that the whole city gathered and brought the physically sick and those possessed by demons to Jesus for healing. Everybody wanted something.

But what was it that Jesus needed. That is made very clear towards the end of the reading. "In the morning, while it was still very dark, He got up and went out to a deserted place, and there He prayed." Jesus needed quiet time to be alone with His Father. God wanting and needing to spend time alone with God; if you think about it, the relationship of love between Jesus with the Father and the Spirit is an incredible image. But what is even more incredible is that every one of us is included in that divine relationship. Nevertheless, it is up to us to nurture that love which God continually offers to us.

Every relationship needs attention. Whether it is with a spouse, children, co-workers or a neighbor, there has to be some communication for the relationship to

have any real meaning. We could be living next door to someone for twenty years, but if we don't talk to them we would have **no idea** who they really are. Well, it is the same with God. We need to keep the lines of communications open and let our creator in on what is going on in our lives. Never make the mistake of putting God so high on a celestial pedestal that the relationship becomes for us nothing but a Sunday obligation. We always have the opportunity of telling God not only what we are thankful for, what makes us happy, but just as important, we need to express what makes us mad, what frustrates us, **what makes us cry**. If we become comfortable talking to God about our lives, this relationship becomes a **reality** that we cannot, **and more importantly, do not** want live without. When we have God in our life, life is just better.

That does not mean that if you are close to God and pray everyday life becomes problem free. That would be nice, but that is not how life works. What better examples of that are the lives of the apostles? All but one was stabbed, beaten, stoned or crucified.

No one knows exactly what Jesus said to His father when He went off alone to pray. I sometimes imagine that He might have prayed, "These people are driving me crazy! They all want something and are not really listening to anything that I am saying." Remember Jesus was both human and divine, so perhaps He also had

to take a breath, and center Himself. After a while He returns to the apostles and says, “Let’s go so I can proclaim the message; that is what I came to do.”

This is the same way that having an authentic relationship with God works in our lives. There will be days when everything is going great. We weigh ourselves in the morning and lost a couple of pounds, we find money in a pair of pants we have not worn for a while, and we get all green lights on the way to work! Basically all is fine in the world, and it is just good to be alive. Those are the days that it is easy to pray; we feel inspired and see God in a sunset, in a sunrise, in everything around us. Or, if we are honest with ourselves, maybe those the days we talk to God the least?

Then there are days, weeks, or months which seem like years when we feel nothing is going right. Those are the days that **it really is** hard to pray. But if we have a real and loving bond with our God, even if we really do not feel it, we **just know** that God’s love is wrapped around us while we try to hang on until tomorrow.

Having that kind of trust and love with God makes everything we do of greater consequence. Coming to service on Sunday, hearing the words, “Do this in remembrance of Me” and receiving Eucharist could never be taken for granted. Celebrating with our church family becomes more significant, and making sure that our children learn about this most gracious God at Sunday school becomes the

priority. This relationship with the Almighty makes us understand that involvement in the outside or global community is a privilege and never a bother. Just like St. Paul, spreading the Good News becomes part of whatever we do because we want everyone to know how incredibly wonderful it is to have God in our life.

So if we have not done it lately, we should sit and talk to God for awhile. We can come as we are, no formal prayer is necessary. Tell God what is happening in your life. Nothing we say is boring, everything about us is important to Our Lord. It is also very important that every once and awhile we should be quiet. We must give God a chance to do the talking. It is in the silence that we will be able hear the divine Spirit speak to our hearts.

If you give your pray life some time, I can almost guarantee that before too long, just like St. Paul, you will begin a love affair with your God.