

V Pentecost (9b)  
July 5, 2009  
Mk 6.1-13  
Fr. Dow Sanderson

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It is the rather “standard” package for an American tourist visiting Great Britain... A few days in Edinburgh, then a nice bus trip south, stopping of course at the Woolen Mill at Moffit to purchase short bread, scarves and various Tartan-themed souvenirs, and in my case a particularly interesting bottle of single-malt with the irresistible name: *Glen Fiona*.

Then it is on to the English Lake District. A particularly gorgeous God-touched stretch of land, which contains the little village of Grasmere. A tour of the Beatrix Potter home is in order, as well as a tour of Dove Cottage, the home of William Wordsworth. And inevitably, the fair skinned young English tour guide, with her accent so mesmerizing to Americans will tell the story. It seems that old Mr. Wordsworth dressed rather shabbily and seemed to the towns folk to be rather eccentric. He just walked back in forth along the dirt roads and through the daffodils, rather aimlessly sauntering. He was seen by everyone, and yet nobody paid him too much attention.

One day it was announced that the poet laureate of England was to give an address at St. Oswald’s Church. People crowded in, and when the distinguished visitor walked in, the groan was unmistakable. *It ain’t nothing but old Wordsworth!* ...And he could do no mighty works that day, because of their unbelief.

It is an amazing phenomenon, but it is so very true. Many of us were touched last January when Bishop Lawrence taught the Sunday School Class before the Confirmation liturgy. He told each candidate that, before he confirmed him or her, he wanted gently to hold their face with each hand so he could look in their eyes and see them as God sees them, because, he explained, we so often see through the filter of our prejudice.

He reminded us that he had for many years served as rector of a parish that was across the street from the hospital where he was born. You can’t get more local than that! But the consequence was that when people saw him as an adult, their recollections were colored by their familiarity.

*Oh yeah, Mark. I remember when he backed the car into the tree when he was sixteen years old.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ had begun his public ministry. Great crowds had heard him preach. People eagerly drew near to hear his life changing words. The sick were healed. The blind were given sight. The dead were raised.

And yet, when he came to his own country, to his own people, they were scandalized that a local boy would dare such impertinence. *Where did this man get all this? Who does he think he is? Is not this Joseph the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother right here, and all his family? Why, he is outrageous! How dare he presume to teach us anything!*

It’s the same old story.

And I would imagine it was not one of the brighter days for Nazareth. No one called for an anniversary parade. No resolutions from town council commemorating the day the Messiah stopped by and got the cold shoulder.

But haven't we all done the same thing, in varying degrees? How many times have you learned something about an acquaintance, some quiet talent, some inner charm that you could have known about years earlier, if you only took the slightest interest? *I've known you all these years, and I never knew!*

Sometimes we have seen heartbreaking cases where parents spend a lifetime not really knowing their children... or spouses passing like ships in the night, never taking the time to truly learn the heart of the other. *If I had only known, if I had only known* is a truly sad and tragic refrain.

Relationships must be nurtured. And we learn the heart of another by listening.

And the same is true of our relationship with God.

Holman Hunt, the painter whose famous work *The Light of the World* hangs in St. Paul's Cathedral in London painted another less famous work. But it is remarkable in its subject matter. It depicts Jesus standing on the steps of the Cathedral. But everyone is rushing past him. Newspapers tucked under an arm. Darting this way and that. So preoccupied that they practically knock the savior of the world down as they clamor to and fro, oblivious to his presence.

Or as Fr. Dan reminded us in a very fine sermon last Good Friday of a famous Anglo-Catholic parish in a busy section of Chicago. A huge Crucifix is carved into the exterior façade. And under the Crucifix is the haunting question, *Is it nothing to you, all who pass by?*

Is it nothing? Is Jesus so "familiar" to us that we don't even know him? Is our relationship with the Living God such that we will one day slap our heads in disbelief exclaiming, *If I'd only known!*

It seems to me that this Gospel passage concerning the chilly reception at the hometown synagogue is really an opportunity for a little spiritual inventory. *Are we listening for the voice of Jesus in the quiet moments of our day? Do we even have any quiet moments! Are we faithful in mass attendance? The reading of Scripture? In the discipline of prayer? Are we making the effort to have a relationship?*

Because it is not just Bishops at confirmation who wish to gently take our faces in their hands. Our Lord Jesus Christ also gazes intently into our eyes. HE sees us as God sees us... and he loves us anyway. In spite of the trees we backed into at sixteen. In spite of the ditches into which we have fallen. In spite of every reason we have given him to the contrary. He loves us with a love that can never be measured by human understanding.

He knows us intimately. All he wants is for us to know him better.

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AMEN