

Homily.50rdC.2.6.22
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RELYING ON OUR TALENT

Today's Gospel raises some great issues.

How talented are you? How talented am I? What am I good at, and how far will my talent take me? We all have to deal with this issue, no matter our age, no matter our stage of life.

A few years ago, I went out to play golf at LaFortune Park late one afternoon, with just enough time to play 9 holes. As I prepared to hit my drive on the first tee, a cart drove up, with one golfer in it, a guy who looked to be in his mid-30's, who asked if he could join me. I said "Sure."

We had not played together very long before I realized this guy was a real athlete, and that no doubt his athletic background involved more than golf. So I asked him what was his real sport.

"Baseball," he said. He told me he had been a pitcher at OSU, which I knew had a very successful baseball program. I asked him if he had thought he could play baseball in the major leagues.

He told me that he did, and that he played a full season in the minor leagues after graduating from OSU. During spring training at the beginning of his second season, he said, a bus drove up and a bunch of guys from the Dominican Republic got out. He concluded, "That's when I knew my baseball career was over."

So you have to sympathize with today's Gospel, with what Jesus does to Peter. Peter thought he was good at fishing. What Jesus did for him was amazing, but also humiliating.

It's interesting that, in today's Gospel story, Jesus and Peter were not strangers. In Luke's Gospel, after Jesus had impressed his audience in the temple, he went to Peter's house and cured Peter's mother-in-law. So Jesus and Peter knew each other, and Peter knew that Jesus had a very special power. No problem, so far.

But then, for Peter, Jesus went too far. Peter was a professional at fishing. He had his own boat. He seemed to be a leader among the fisherman. He knew his business.

So when Jesus told Peter to go back out fishing after working hard all night and catching nothing, Peter obeyed but we can assume he did so reluctantly.

Then after the great catch of fish, I love the way Luke describes this, “Astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him,” and Peter, out of fear, begged Jesus to leave him alone.

What’s going on here? Shouldn’t Peter be excited that Jesus could help him be even more spectacular in his fishing business?

No. Peter is not excited about that. It’s almost as if he’s thinking, “Jesus, you can heal my mother-in-law, but I don’t want you in my life. Thanks for all the fish, but now I don’t know what to expect from you. I don’t know what you expect of me. And I do know I don’t want to change. I’m fine with what I was doing before you came along.”

And this is the temptation for all of us.

The Bible tells us that Jesus offers each one of us something greater than we could ever have from our own efforts.

Saint John tells us in his first letter: “God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him.”

Jesus says in the Gospel of John, Chapter 10: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

What kind of life does Jesus offer us?

Saint Paul describes this life very specifically in his letters.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to “the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might.”

Later in the same letter, Saint Paul speaks of “Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

In his Letter to the Colossians, Paul writes that we can be “filled with the knowledge of God’s will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father.”

Jesus gives us a choice. He doesn’t force upon us the life that He offers us.

Like Peter in today's Gospel, we are so tempted to tell Jesus "No. I'm content with who I am now. I don't want to change. I'm very capable of doing what I want to do, I can do what I need to do, without your help. I'm a decent person. I go to church. I'm nice to people. I'm okay, thanks."

The real issue for each of us is this: We want to rely on our own talent rather than the grace, the power, that Jesus can make available to us. Why?

Maybe we don't believe in grace.

Maybe we don't want to give control of our lives over to Jesus. Maybe, like Peter, we sense that Jesus is going to change us, and we don't see that we have any need to change.

So what happened to Peter? For a long time, it wasn't much of a success story.

Jesus tells him, "Get behind me, Satan." Peter denies Jesus 3 times. He is noticeably absent during the Crucifixion.

But then the Holy Spirit shows up. And Peter is a changed man. As described in the Acts of the Apostles, the bold preaching of Peter is bringing thousands of people to believe in Jesus. Peter is healing the sick and the lame. Peter is relishing the fact that he is being punished for what he is now doing for Jesus.

Like Peter, a simple, uneducated fisherman, we don't have to be anyone special to experience the power, the life, that Jesus offers every one of us. But we do have to be humble enough to say to Jesus, "I want You in my life. I want You to take over my life. I want Your Holy Spirit to change me, to guide me, and to give me the power to do whatever it is You want me to do when You want me to do it."

So are you good at something? Do you have talent? How far can you go?

Give what you have to Jesus. Let Him do what He wants to with it. Let Him have the trophy, the recognition. And He will give you a life beyond Your dreams, as You experience His love, His truth and the amazing reality of His grace, working every moment of your life.