

## From The Pastor

Last week we reflected on the question of St. James: where do the wars and conflicts among you arise? We challenged ourselves to look at our inner dispositions and moods that can lead to negative and aggressive relations with others. We also reflected that these inner dispositions are often the hidden or repressed anger or wounded emotions that we have not yet been successfully resolved. We said that these unresolved emotions can be a place where ‘darkness’ can find a foothold leaving us feeling vulnerable, inadequate, and at times out of control.

It impresses me that today’s readings are essentially the same message approached from a different angle. We find ourselves again faced with the tensions of human jealousy, pride, and the inner tensions that steal our peace. Today we can look at this universal human tension from a rather different perspective.

There is a deep desire in the human personality to want to be great. To be conscious and alive, to be in control of our faculties and abilities makes human beings want to grow, to advance, and to be more. This is a good thing. Thomas Aquinas calls this “desiderium naturale”; that is, a natural desire to be great. Why is this?

We are children of God, made by God, with the divine essence as the very core of our being. Human greatness in truth is not something we earn or merit by human accomplishment or success. In the Spirit, through a mature relationship with God we come to learn or discover our greatness as gift. The essence of God in us drives us to greatness, but we struggle to grasp and understand this inner fire because we see ourselves, others, and the world from a narrow human perspective.

Notice the first reading. Moses is weary and overworked. He needs help with managing all the people. God instructs him to gather the people together and pray. Moses prays and the gift of prophesy comes to all those intended by God to receive this gift, including Eldad and Medad who were left back in the village. Joshua, like John in the gospel, complains that because they were not present they should not share in this gift. Joshua is stuck in a box. He expects God to act in the way he thinks. He is motivated by jealousy and ego, as is John in the gospel example. A common truism: we feel diminished and threatened by those who we see as greater than us, yet we feel inflated and important because of those who are below us in rank, strength, or ability.

Our drive for greatness is so strong that it causes dissension, disunity, and deep inner tensions. Such tensions are felt as anger projected and dumped on others who we perceive as hindering our ascent to greatness. If we could only see and accept with humility that we are all great because God made us that way.

The examples in the gospel are strong ones: cutting off a hand, foot, or eye for the sake of not sinning. Jesus is exaggerating because of the importance of the point. Just last week the disciples were arguing who was the greatest, or most important. Jesus instructed them, but they obviously didn’t get the point. Now He uses a highly exaggerated example to help them see.

Nothing is more important than a rightful relationship with God. Nothing! A disordered relationship with God, especially one that causes others to lose their faith, or peace with God is worse than death. It is very clear that Jesus is serious about this point. Human ego, jealousy, and competition are not the way of God, nor are they the way to God.

To discover our inner greatness is to look underneath the ego defenses that cover feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, or inferiority. Anger is the cover emotion because it can make us feel strong, independent, and separate from others. What it really covers is the ‘hole’ or empty place in us that makes us feel vulnerable, and unable to stand our ground. Go into that inner place, that emptiness, and just be there. Don’t try to fix or fill it. Just be there. Before long this place will begin to fill with an awareness of your inner essence, your greatness. Then you will discover your true inner strength and the greatness of your true self. Now you will be strong and no longer a victim to the cover emotion of anger that can mask the lie of inferiority or inadequacy.

This is not an over night project, but it is the spiritual path that awakens us to our God given greatness. Self esteem, and positive self-regard originally comes from God, and not our human doings. Human ego and the arrogance of sin distort our perception of our inner greatness so we seek to become great by ourselves. Inferiority, inadequacy, and fear are the lies of sin caused by the negative behavior of others, or ourselves. The passion of Jesus is to make us see and realize the life of the Father within us. Take the weight of anger and hidden self-rejection off your neck, and see God’s greatness in you as a freely given, unmerited, unconditional gift.

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