

Homily: Aug. 30, 2021

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We gather to celebrate and give thanks to God for sending his son, Jesus, a man of hope, and for calling all of us disciples of his son, to be people of hope for one another, near and far. We realize, however, that we do not always fulfill that grand calling of being people of hope. Therefore, we call upon our compassionate God, “Lord have mercy.”

In the first reading Paul describes ever so briefly but beautifully the final gathering up by God through Jesus of those who have died along with those still living. This is our hope. What we hope for about our after-life impacts upon how we see and hope about what is going on now. Ultimately, as Paul says, “we shall always be with the Lord. Console one another with these words.”

Jesus knew himself to be a source of hope, identifying himself with prophet Isaiah as one who believed that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him: to bring glad tidings to the poor; to proclaim liberty to captives—captives of all kinds—those stuck in jails, prisons, dysfunctional families and addictions. Jesus came to bring recovery of sight, physical and spiritual sight. He came to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim an acceptable year (time) to the Lord.

However, Jesus reminded his own family, neighbors and other residents of Nazareth, that God’s miraculous work and healing is usually blocked out when people don’t hope in a radical way, meaning to believe and hope that great things can be done by people one knows well—an ordinary person, like a relative and even next-door neighbor. When people lose hope in God being able to work wonders through our ordinary neighbors and relatives---nothing happens. In fact, even Jesus’ neighbors’ evil intent to throw Jesus over the cliff didn’t happen either. They seemed stuck in their comfortable and narrow perceptions. They were blind, they were captive and they had become oppressive toward any goodness coming from beyond their little boxed-in notions about life.

Jesus is calling us and inviting us ordinary folks to be messengers of glad and hopefilled tidings for poor people—poor in many ways. Jesus wants us to be free from any form of captivity and to be capable as well as willing, to free others. He desires us to see beyond our normal human blindness—to see the goodness and God-possible greatness in those we know well and don’t know so well.

I was struck last night as I saw a Phoenix newspaper present various concrete ways to help in resettling Afghan refugees—including the possibility of volunteering and directing financial help through various trustworthy organizations, including Catholic Charities. Yes, Jesus is calling us to be people of hope as he and prophet Isaiah were in their time and place.

As Jesus also hopes, may these scripture passages be fulfilled today, too, as we have just heard them.