

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

I wonder why Jesus was so amazed at peoples' lack of faith in Him. You couldn't really blame them. After all they knew His background, His family, and the village He came from. All of this was very much at odds with who He was claiming to be, the Son of God.

They were amazed at His knowledge, His teaching authority, and the rumours of some of the miracles that He performed. But when He was back there in their midst what dominated was the memory of His ordinariness.

Their perception closed them to the presence of the Divine in their midst. And so Jesus moved on. Now we tend to have a similar problem. It is a very human trait to accept and judge things at their face value. What we know is what we see in front of us, and the more often we see it and become familiar with it, the more we take it for granted. Our perception of somebody or something is dulled by our familiarity with them. We absolve ourselves of the need to look again or to look deeper, because we have already made a judgement and have filed that away in our mental computer.

Just as Jesus' neighbour could not see the divine in Him., so too our dulled perceptions can close us to an awareness of those subtle shafts of the presence of God and the Glory of God in other people and other things.

Jesus could have worked some stunning miracles for them, swamped them, completely overwhelmed them with His Divine power, and left them no room but that they had to believe. But He didn't, He moved on because the quality of response that we call faith was not present.

Faith must be a free response to believe in God, not something forced by irresistible signs and wonders.

Time and again in the Gospels where Jesus encounters faith in Him, then He performs the miracle. Those familiar words of His, "Your faith has made you whole", does not mean that that blind or crippled person's mental state causes their cure. Rather, it is a condition of their cure; because they believe in Him, He will cure them.

God will never overwhelm our freedom to respond to Him in faith. In His wisdom He chooses to deal very subtly, and very gently with His creatures.

If we have faith and try to instil the habit of looking at things through the eyes of faith, then that faith sharpens our perception and opens us up to be able to see and interpret the subtle and sometimes obscure presence of God in our lives.

It is the human way to say, "If I see it first, then I will believe in it". Christ turns that upside down and says believe first in order that you might see.

The circumstances of our lives are irradiated with the shafts of the subtle presence of God and God's glory. Faith opens up our eyes that important little bit so that we can see the presence of the Divine right there in front of us.

It is there in front of us in so many things that we are over familiar with and take for granted.

If I have the eyes to see it, the subtle glory of God should shine from the awesome complex miracle that is that other person standing there before me.

Not just in their physical presence, but in the things we take for granted and think nothing of. Their love, kindness, fidelity, constancy, caring and perseverance.

If God is love, then where there is love, there is also the subtle presence of God, the grounds of that love. I could go on; the subtle presence of God is there in the marvels of nature. It is also there paradoxically in suffering and in death.

Christ says in the Gospels, "They have eyes, but they cannot see. They have ears, but they cannot hear". The presence of God, the Divine, is all around us. It is only when we deepen our faith that the miracle is performed, our perception opens us up to behold God's subtle presence, and our faith is, in turn, deepened further.

To be followers of Christ we must believe first in order that we might see.

An act of faith in God is the precondition of knowledge of God.