

Homily
25ORDB
St. Bernard Church
Sept. 20, 2015

Life here in the United States is all about achievement. No matter how well a person performed last year, he or she is expected to do even better this year. We're measured by our accomplishments, by the grades we get in school, by how much we produce in our work, and so on.

This is true in most walks of life, and it's even true of charitable organizations. I was executive director of two charities for a total of almost 14 years, and there was constant pressure to raise more money, expand programs and serve more people.

I think it's interesting to apply modern performance standards to the life of Jesus. When you think about it, he spent the first 30 years of his life very quietly, spending all of them in Nazareth, and really not doing a whole lot that was very significant, doing just a bit of preaching in the temple when he was 12 and then following that with some carpentry work.

His public life lasted only 3 years. As he mentioned in today's Gospel, the basic plan was to do some miracles and some teaching, be killed and then rise from the dead. I think if most of us had the supernatural powers that Jesus had, we might have done things a lot differently.

The main message in today's Gospel is that one of the main obstacles to our having a close relationship with Jesus is our desire for personal achievement. When it comes to the spiritual dimension of life, our desire for personal achievement, for recognition, just gets in the way.

Jesus tells the disciples that he's going to be killed, but they ignore him, focusing instead on which one of them is the greatest. He tells them He is going to die, but all they care about is getting recognition for their wonderful achievements.

Jesus knows exactly what they have been talking about, and so he responds to their desire for recognition by taking a child, placing the child in their midst, and telling them that it's the child who is most like Him. It's the child who is closest to Him. It's the child that they should try to be like.

From Mark's account of this event, the child is completely passive. The child has no name. The child does nothing. The child hasn't accomplished anything. The child is simply there, simply content to be in the presence of Jesus, to be held in the arms of Jesus.

The contrast between the disciples and the child could not be any stronger, any wider.

Several years ago, I met a young man from St. Bernard's who has since moved away. I think he was from Pittsburgh. When I met him, he was in his early 30's, married with young children, and very devout in his Catholic faith.

He told me that as a young adult, he had drifted away from the Church and from his relationship with God. Then, on a trip back home to Pennsylvania, he had gone through a box of old things from his childhood. In the box was a recording that he and his classmates in his Catholic elementary school had made of them singing some religious songs. He played the recording, and as he listened to the sweet, innocent, childish voices, he began to weep.

He wept over the faith that he had as a child and how so much of that simple, innocent faith had been lost as his life had become more focused on achievement and getting ahead and had become so much more complicated.

Listening to that recording brought him back, back to a humble faith in God, not focusing on the need to accomplish anything, to prove anything to anybody.

Just so we don't get the wrong idea, being content to be a child with Jesus doesn't mean that we won't be active, that there won't be things to do. The difference is that Jesus will be leading the way. He will get the credit for what is accomplished, and that is true whether we are a doctor, a lawyer, a plumber, a graphic artist or a housewife, as long as we are pursuing the plan that God has for our lives.

For example, I have a friend, John, whom I've known for over 20 years. John is a lawyer. After I had known him for just a year or so, he came by my office one day, just to chat. We talked for several minutes, and then I said to John, "There's something different about you. You seem so much more relaxed, so much more at peace. What happened?"

John smiled, slightly, and said, "My life has been so different since I turned my law practice over to Jesus." He explained how now he had virtually no anxiety about how much business he had, or where business would come from, or the direction his law practice needed to go. Whatever Jesus did with his law practice was okay, more than okay, with him.

Today, people who don't know the story of John's life would give him credit and recognition for the success he enjoys as a lawyer. John knows who should really get the credit and recognition for all the blessings he has received in his life.

No matter what our calling in life, it all starts with an attitude that at the very core of our lives, we are just children content to be in the presence of Jesus. The foundation of everything, of all that we are, is this reality, that are in the presence of Jesus and can be content just to be in his presence, not doing anything, not saying anything, not even praying.

This is what is so beautiful and powerful about Eucharistic Adoration. Even though we are always in the presence of Jesus, there is a special quality to Eucharistic Adoration, a more intense awareness of Jesus' presence, his peace, his mercy and his love.

When we are consistently conscious of the presence of Jesus, we will be able to discern the direction that God wants us to go, the things He wants us to do. And God will bless all of our efforts and make them productive for His purposes, not ours. Of course, all of the credit for the good that is accomplished should go to Him, not to us.

This is how we should start every day, and this is the thought we should carry with us all day long. That we're always, constantly, in the presence of Jesus, letting him put his arms around us every moment of the day and night, letting Him guide us, bless us and love us.