

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time: To See and Be Seen

An elderly priest used to come down to Florida to get out of the cold and help in the local parishes. Many people knew him. When he came down from the north they would say, "It's great to see you, Father," to which he would respond, "And it's great to be seen."

It's great to see you, and it's great to be seen. Jesus told the story today of two men in the Temple who were concerned about seeing and being seen. One stayed in the back of the Temple area. He didn't care whether any others saw he was there. He just felt a huge wave of guilt that he should be there seen by God. The second man had no guilt being before God, and he took a front place in the Temple area, making sure that not only God, but many others could witness his piety. Both men came to the Temple to see God. The arrogant man was convinced that it was wonderful that God and others could see him.

Today I want to build on the thought "to see and be seen." There are two facets to seeing and being seen as it relates to our presence in Church. There is the aspect of other people seeing us here and our seeing who else is here, and there is the aspect of seeing God and being seen by God.

Last Sunday we celebrated our parish picnic. People didn't come just to eat hot dogs and chicken, but to spend a day with their church friends. Most of us have church friends, people we may not see during the week, but who we look forward to seeing before or after Mass. We may not even know their names, but we always sit near them and are happy to see them. We love watching their children grow. Sometimes we've kept an eye on their little ones when Mom or Dad were alone and had to rush the baby to the bathroom for a change. We share their joy when their children receive their First Communion, or Confirmation, and we join the parents' pride when their children participate in a ministry such as serving, lecturing, ushering or singing. At the same time, we would be wrong if the main reason why we come to Church would be to see our friends. If Church were nothing more than a social gathering, then it would not be all that different than neighborhood gatherings. Still, it is good to see each other. Better, it is good to pray with each other.

Seeing others could have negative aspects, though. If we come to Church because we want others to see us, then we are using God to advance our stature in the community. I remember a man who was running for an office and who never set foot in Church, except when there would be a large gathering of people from the city who might be swayed to vote for him. This is the definition of hypocrisy, a word deriving from the Greek word for acting.

A second negative aspect that can result from seeing others is our making a judgment on others. We might see someone and in the recesses of our minds think, "What is he doing here? She doing here? Probably he or she is trying to make up for being so mean, for being unfaithful, for being dishonest. Well, the nerve of him or her

for coming to Church.” We all know that it is very wrong for us to judge others. It is doubly wrong to judge others for coming to Church. Many times, most of the time, when we judge others we are simply transferring the negative feeling we have about ourselves onto others. Transference is an ugly thing. We have to fight off negative thoughts about others in the same way that we fight off any bad thought. I find the best way to do that is to say to myself, “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner.” Then the occasion of sin become an occasion for prayer. We beat the devil at his own game.

The only person that we should come to Church to see and be seen by is God. Maybe there are times, perhaps many times, that we come before Him feeling like that man in the back of the Temple area, with a deep recognition of our sins. We want to fall on our knees like Peter did in *Luke 5:8* and say, “Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man.” Perhaps, we have not fallen into sin recently, but we have come to a deeper realization of the extent of past sins. We used someone, afterwards went to confession, but now many years later and a bit wiser, we are plagued by the thought of how our actions may have hurt that other person. “What direction did he or she go in life due to my actions?” we ask. More, “Does God forgive me even though I did not realize how evil my actions were?” we worry. And so we say, “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.” God forgives everything when we confess a sin, even those dreadful aspects of the sin that we did not even realize when we went to confession many years ago. It is all forgiven. We need to forgive ourselves. At the same time, we need to be realistic and come before the Lord with a keen awareness of our sinfulness.

This is the reason why our Masses begin with a penitential rite. We begin Mass with a reminder of our sinfulness. We express this to the Lord, “Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy,” and then we continue Mass entering into a deeper relationship with God, the Holy One.

And Jesus says, “I see you. I know how you are trying to serve God. I know your strength, and I know your weakness. I see you. I see your love. And I love you. When it is time to leave church, leave knowing that I am with you, always, to the end of time.”

It is a good thing to see and be seen. It is a good thing to see God. It is a good thing to be seen by the One who loves us.