

September 22, 2024 – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“Jesus the Teacher” by Pastor Julio Romero

Gospel: Mark 9:30-37

Eric Butterworth once told about a college professor who had his sociology class go into the slum community to get case histories of 200 young boys. The students were asked to write an evaluation of each boy's future. In every case the students wrote, "He hasn't got a chance."

Twenty-five years later another sociology professor came across the earlier study. He had his students follow up on the project to see what had happened to these boys, with the exception of 20 boys who had moved away or died. The students learned that 176 of the remaining 180 had achieved success as lawyers, doctors and businessmen.

The professor was astounded by the results. The earlier study was so inaccurate. What had happened to change the futures of these young boys? Fortunately, all the men were in the area and he was able to ask each one, "How do you account for your success?" In each case the reply came back, "There was this teacher..."

That teacher was still alive, so he looked for her and asked the elderly, but still alert, woman what magic formula she had used to pull these boys out of the slums into successful achievement. The teacher's eyes sparkled and her lips broke into a smile. "It's really very simple," she said. "I loved those boys." This teacher saw possibilities in them that no one else saw.

When the disciples called the Lord Jesus "Teacher", they were right, That is what the Lord Jesus was to them and is to us today, a "teacher" a "rabbi", a teacher of theology and of love who taught His disciples and teaches us now the word and love of God and how to apply it in our day to day lives.

He taught the disciples how the many prophecies written in the Holy Scriptures were being fulfilled in Him. Today's Gospel illustrates that point. In it He is teaching about His impending passion, impending suffering, death and resurrection, something the disciples could not understand, and the truth is, who would?

He also taught His disciples about life issues, day to day things that are important in our lives together as part of a family, a community, like the one we heard today from the Gospel this morning. The disciples were arguing who was going to be the greatest

among them. Being the best teacher He was, Jesus told them that “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

To illustrate his point the Lord Jesus took a child in His arms and said to them ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

What the Lord is teaching here is not new to our ears; we know most of His teachings, teachings like the Golden Rule, the Beatitudes, the series of teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount, like “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”, just to mention a few.

Do you remember the story of the female teacher I told you at the beginning? How did she change the future of those kids many considered lost, with no promise, no future, no chance at life?

She changed their future with “love”. Love was the magic formula for her to give them a chance in life. It was love that made her see possibilities that no one else saw for those kids.

Well, we cannot say the disciples had no chance to succeed in life. They were all grown up and were not doing too badly as fishermen, farmers, and other vocations like Matthew, the tax collector.

There was one thing they didn’t have a chance of. Without Jesus in their lives they had no chance of learning the true knowledge of God, of learning about how God understands and how He wishes things would be and work in this world.

For the disciples it was important to be first, to be the greatest. They would risk their friendship and upset each other in order to be number one, because we know what being number one is about: it is about respect, honour and more. Being the greatest, the number one, means that a nobody can become somebody. It is here where Jesus saw a problem with the disciples’ way of thinking.

The disciples didn’t realize that in God’s eyes we are already “someone”, that we don’t need to be the greatest to be somebody, and to prove it He took a child in His arms and, interpreting Jesus’ words, what He said was that any child is equal to Him and is as great as He is. Why would He say something like that? Because that little child is loved by God the Father as much as Jesus is loved by His Father.

Love is what makes the difference. It was love that made the difference for the disciples, it was Jesus' love for His disciples that made Him see the potential a group of fishermen had to become messengers of His Gospel, to become healers, miracle workers, church builders, people who could be gifted with the Holy Spirit.

We know what the Pharisees and Scribes thought of Jesus' disciples. For the Pharisees and the Scribes that went where Jesus went, the disciples were a lost class, destined to fail. They called Jesus' friends sinners. Probably they thought that if these people are going to be in Jesus' class, they don't have any chance to succeed, they are a loss cause right from the start. All this is what the Pharisees and Scribes thought of Jesus' students.

Jesus thought differently about them. He saw possibilities, He saw the heart of those disciples, He saw great potential in each of them. Why? Because He loved them, The Pharisees and the Scribes didn't and that's the difference.

I don't think that there is one person in whom the Lord Jesus doesn't see any potential or possibilities to succeed in life as good servants, as good messengers of his Gospel, to be a better person, and a better human being overall, but at the end of the day, it is up to us to achieve it. God is there to help us all the way through, but at the end of the day, that decision is in our hands.

Remember Judas. Jesus was his teacher, and I am sure Jesus loved Judas as much as he loved the rest of his class and saw great possibilities, great potential in him but Judas' bad judgement, misguided decision, selfishness, own agenda, made him fail, fail horrendously.

We are here in this world because of God's love. We are in a place where perhaps some didn't see any potential and possibilities in us but God did and for that we are who we are and give thanks to God. Now, with God's help, let's continue achieving more good works for God, for others and for ourselves. *Amen.*

