Homily Second Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B 15 January 2012 (read only)

Those who have embarked on a new diet or fitness regime sometimes encourage themselves by reciting the mantra ‘my body is my temple’. There’s a lot of talk about bodies and temples in our readings this weekend.

Our second reading with its persistent repetition of an embarrassing ‘F’ word probably has us squirming in our seats but Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is a likely source of the phrase the body is a temple; indeed the temple of the Holy Spirit. And Paul’s purpose is to urge those who would follow Christ to treat our own bodies and those of others with profound respect. Paul underlines this by reminding us of two central tenets of Christian faith. First that our bodies are destined to share in the Resurrection, and second that we each participate in the body of Christ.

In our first reading we meet the young Samuel trying to give his body some rest. Like every teenager, he probably needs more than the rest of us. Now, it is worth noting that Samuel’s efforts at sleeping take place at the very heart of the temple. He is in the sanctuary that houses the Ark of the Covenant. This is the ark containing the tablets of stone on which were inscribed the commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Little wonder then that Samuel’s mentor Eli eventually discerned that the voice calling out to his young protégé was the voice of God. So he rightly advised him to use his ears and mouth to listen and respond to the one who called him.

The scriptures repeatedly describe our encounters with God as though they are mediated through the senses. And today’s gospel is another case in point with its repeated references to the eyes and to seeing. First up is John who stares hard at Jesus before identifying him as ‘the lamb of God’. Then when some of John’s followers enquire where Jesus lives he invites them to ‘come and see’, and so they went and they saw. When, the next day they bring Simon along to meet him we are told how Jesus looked hard at him.

These repeated references to looking remind us of the familiar saying that the eye is the window to the soul. Making eye contact can be hard for those who are bashful because looking someone directly in the eyes requires confidence. Boxers meeting their opponents engage in eye to eye contact staring each other out to make each other flinch and reveal weakness. Doctors with difficult news to impart may struggle to look a patient in the eye. All of us find it difficult to look someone in the eye when trying to hide something or to deceive. Parents and lovers insist on looking their loved ones in the eyes to test the trustworthiness of their claims and stories.

We might ask ourselves which of these ways looking takes place in our own encounters with Christ; maybe a bit of each. It’s hard sometimes to accept the enormity of God’s love. We can be bashful, lack confidence and so struggle to see for ourselves the look of love. Others can find themselves intimidated and challenged by the gospel as it unearths the flaws in our bravado. We may also struggle to look our mortality squarely in the eye and so miss out on perceiving how Christ offers to share our fears and griefs with us. We are also uncomfortable when we are brought face to face with the deceptions and dishonesties that we have been party to. But ultimately we would do well to realise that Christ is waiting for us to look him in the eye, not to heighten our anxieties or sense of unworthiness but to impart deep in our hearts the assurance of his own trustworthiness. He looks not to catch us out but to draw us closer to his own heart.

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