14th Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle A – July 5, 2014

“Imagine, what a wonderful world”

Zechariah 9:9-10
Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14
Romans 8:9, 11-13
Matthew 11:25-30

We all perceive things differently don’t we? Our experiences and observations inform our understanding of people and things and therefore have a bearing on *how* we perceive see things. However, *preconceived notions* can skew the way we understand or even learn new things and this can often put us at odds and complicate things with others, right? Preconceptions can stand in the way of us truly being open to new events and opportunities unfolding before us. We can find ourselves overlooking what is right in front of us.

This is a bit of the context for our Gospel today. In this part of Matthews Gospel leading up to today’s Gospel, Jesus faces constant rejection as he attempts to reveal himself and his mission which fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts. Those he had taught and performed miracles for, remained unrepentant because their preconceived notions of who Jesus was got in the
way of them listening and experiencing the Truth that he was revealing to them. In spite of all of this, in today’s Gospel, Jesus takes a step back and gives thanks to His Father for all that has gone right up to this point. He thanks the Father for those who have listened to him and have chosen to follow him. They were not the well-educated or the religious leaders, “the wise and the learned” as Jesus puts it, that one would expect to recognize who Jesus was and what he was here to do. No, instead they were the “the little ones” Jesus says; those without social status or much expertise in religious matters. Jesus came to reveal himself to the pure in spirit; those who struggle with life; those who humbly strive to live a life in accord with the Law of God in the hope fulfilling their part of the covenant. Jesus reveals himself to those without preconceived notions of who He was supposed to be. They were therefore, able to experience Jesus for who he was and as a result were able to find peace and truly see the wonder of God in their midst.

Let me try to illustrate my point. Is everyone familiar with Pandora, the online streaming music service? Well about a month ago I was listening to Pandora while working around the house and I had a couple of stations shuffling together. One of the songs that came on was John Lennon’s epic
song *Imagine*. That song was immediately followed by Louis Armstrong’s famous hit *What a Wonderful World*. What struck me about these two songs, especially hearing them back to back, was how the very same world, going through the same turbulent times of the late ’60s and early ‘70’s was perceived so differently and portrayed in stark contrast to each other despite attempting to convey a sense of hope and peace.

I am a huge Beatles fan and like a lot of John Lennon’s solo music. For a long time I really loved the song *Imagine* because it was beautiful and simple musically but also because it envisions a world without wars or struggles and which is at peace. The song is very idealistic, which is not a bad thing, but as I listened to the song more and more the lyrics began to trouble me. Here are a few of them:

“Imagine there is no heaven / It’s easy if you try
No hell below us / Above us only sky”;

and

“Imagine there’s no countries / It isn’t hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for / And no religion, too.”

This vision, written by someone considered an informed intellectual, “wise and learned” in the words of Jesus, of a world living as one, in peace and harmony, presumes that possessions or differences in countries or
religions are the SOURCE of discord. It fails to acknowledge these as gifts from God for the good of each other and humanities responsibility to share them and use them for good. It also fails to acknowledge that realizing a “brotherhood of man” means taking care of our brothers and sisters! But if we remove God and religion from the equation, is this really a world we want to imagine? What’s the point?

The Louis Armstrong song *What a Wonderful World* written by Bob Thiele and George David Weiss is very different. The song was written to be hopeful and optimistic toward the future for a country experiencing racial and political turmoil in the late 1960’s.

“I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night /
And I think to myself / What a wonderful world.”

This song tells of the simple beauty of everyday things and life that we sometimes take for granted. What is even more profound is that this man, who knew a hard life growing up and who died just four years later, sang the song in a way that conveys a genuine gratitude and appreciation for the simple gifts of God found in the imperfect world that existed around him.
I’ve always loved both these songs, but hearing them back to back made me realize what Jesus meant by things being “*hidden...from the wise and learned*” and “*revealed...to the little ones*”. It is our perceptions of the world and its problems and imperfections that allow us to see or not see, what God is revealing to us. When we are faced with adversity or struggles or suffer do we have a tendency to blame God instead of seeking Him? Do we view the imperfections in the world as an absence of God instead the result of humanity turning our back on Him? The message of the Gospel today and of all of Jesus’ teachings is that by really *listening to Him* and *following him* with the simplicity and humility of “*little ones*”, the hardships and burdens of life will be manageable and the beauty of life will not be diminished. God must be the KEY part of the equation, not removed from it! Our struggles won’t go away necessarily, but our ability to cope with them will be easier knowing that we are sharing the experience with Christ. “*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*”, he says.

We have a tendency to overcomplicate things don’t we? By listening to Christ and seeking Him in our times of need with the simplicity of “*little ones*”, we can find peace as His disciples. By trusting in Christ during trials
with meekness and humility we will bear the yoke easily. By praising God for the gifts we received, we might more easily see the world as a reflection of Heaven. Listening and experiencing what the Father has revealed to us through the Son means there is no need to “IMAGINE”, rather we can see for ourselves and profess, “Father, WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD!!!”

“Oh yeah”